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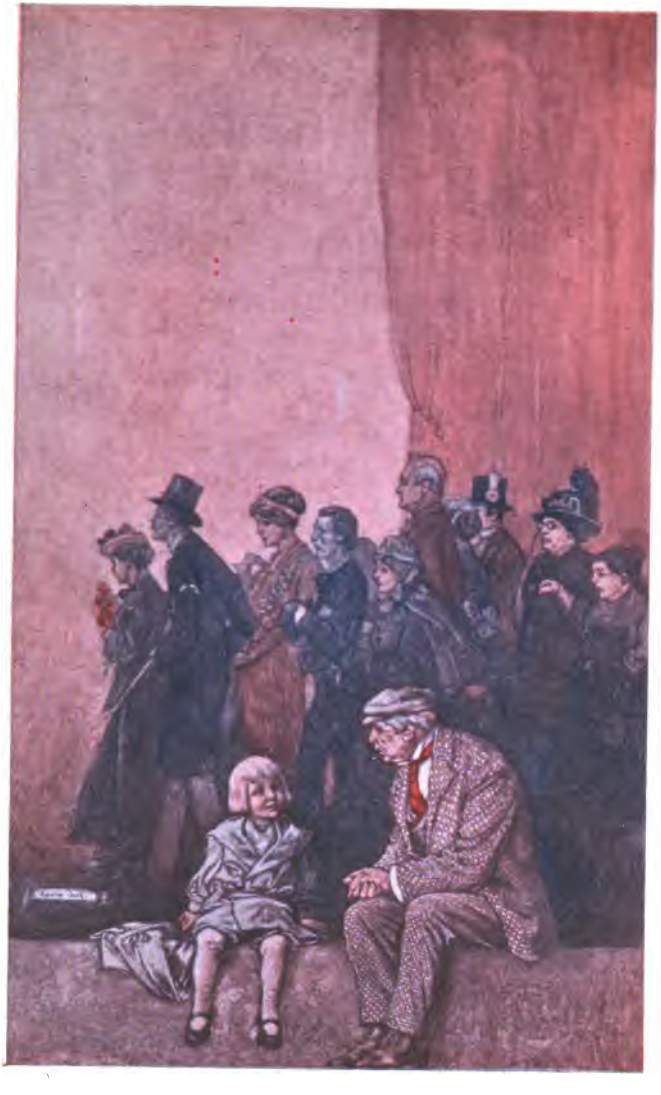

FIVE YEARS TO FIND OUT

By

I. A. R. WYLIE

Author of

THE NATIVE BORN, DIVIDING WATERS
THE DAUGHTER OF BRAHMA, ETC.

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CONTENTS

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FIVE YEARS TO FIND OUT

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CHAPTER I

QUESTIONS

"WHAT I should like," said the Reverend Oscar Hamilton, putting Darwin's *Origin of Species* on the top shelf of the library bookcase and removing the steps, "what I should like, Cecilia, is to see you a true woman."

"Exactly," said Mrs. Hamilton.

"And a happy woman," her husband went on, transforming the writing-table into a pulpit desk. "Now a happy woman is a woman who has found her true sphere and stays in it. I think, my dear, you will remember that admirable little definition of dust. Dust is an object—which out of its place becomes highly noxious and displeasing. The same thing is true of a woman who deserts her vocation in life."

"In other words," Mrs. Hamilton interrupted, "if you did what you were told, Cecilia, instead of loafing about and reading stupid books about mon-

keys, I should have a great deal less dusting to do. The drawing-room this morning was in a condition that made me blush."

"Or if you must read," the vicar caught up, "why not take one of your mother's journals? For instance, here is *The Lady at Home.*"

"Thank you, father, I think I'll take it into the garden."

"Why in the garden, my dear?"

"Because the afternoon is so lovely, and Mrs. Deschesney is out there and I should like to talk to her."

"Shut the window a moment, Cecilia."

Cecilia shut the window. She gave vent to no audible sigh but her whole attitude was weary with resignation.

"Yes, father."

"My dear—" The vicar at this juncture glanced apprehensively at his wife who was not given to taking the response for more than a few minutes at a time. "My dear—just one word of warning. Mrs. Deschesney is, as you know, an old friend of the family and our guest. At the same time she is the last person under whose influence I should like you to come. In her youth, I believe, Mrs. Deschesney had some unfortunate love-affair which has, of course, soured her and driven her into what is called the Movement. In fact, she is modern—regrettably modern both in ideas and actions."

"I can see her smoking now," said Mrs. Hamilton.

"A horrid habit," her husband agreed. "An unwomanly habit. I should like to point out the appropriateness of this point as an example for my little homily on—on—"

"On dust?" his daughter suggested mildly.

Mr. Hamilton looked doubtful and somewhat aggrieved. The great advantage of a sermon is that the preacher can hurl his personal opinions at any number of persons without fear of contradiction. No one—not even a suffragette—has been known to interrupt the more or less even flow of wisdom from the pulpit, and this privilege has induced many an eloquent unheeded soul into the church. Consequently the Reverend Oscar Hamilton who was accustomed to delivering his sermon in three distinct parts—the argument, development and peroration—undisturbed save by legitimate affirmatives from the choir (represented in private life by Mrs. Hamilton) felt himself unpleasantly jolted out of the beaten track. The intent seriousness on his daughter's face was, however, reassuring, and he smiled good-naturedly.

"I don't think that was quite what I meant to say," he said. "But I am sure you have understood my—our—wishes and that is the chief thing. Run along and amuse our guest by all means, my dear."

Cecilia ran along as exhorted. In the course of

her leisurely progress across the lawn her young features lost something of their severity and by the time she had reached the occupant of the wicker chair under the trees she was smiling cheerfully.

"I've come to amuse you, Mrs. Deschesney," she said.

The lady thus addressed looked up from her book and removed an offending ash-tray from the arm of her chair to the tea-table.

"That's very nice of you. I thought you were talking to your father."

"Father was talking to me. Mrs. Deschesney, you're awfully clever. Could you tell me why it is that I always have to 'run' wherever I go? The gardener 'goes' and the curate 'goes' but mother and I both run. Is there any law about it, do you think?"

"It's one of the disabilities of our sex," Mrs. Deschesney said pleasantly. "You will observe that up to the age of forty, all woman are requested to run along. It is proof of our lack of dignity and self-control and general instability of character. Why do you ask?"

"I don't know. There are many things that puzzle me. For instance, why should one love one's relations — "

"My dear girl, one doesn't."

"Well, why should one pretend one does?"

Mrs. Deschesney smiled wryly.

"It's a conspiracy on the part of the relatives,

Cecilia. When you are fifty you'll be telling some luckless girl that as your daughter she is bound to love and honor you. It's the last stronghold of disagreeable old age."

"I'm not going to have a daughter," said Cecilia with decision. "I shan't have any children at all. It's such bad luck to be a child. Not to be free—it's awful."

"My dear child—you are the true daughter of convention—a revolutionary."

The girl nodded, and propping herself against the tree trunk looked up into the elder woman's face with a frank curiosity touched with admiration.

"You are—awfully modern," she said as though clenching an argument.

"Except in years," Mrs. Deschesney admitted. "It is a paradoxical truth that all modern women are old and the old-fashioned young. What has your father been saying about me?"

Cecilia reflected before answering. Mrs. Deschesney, the visible woman, fascinated her exceedingly. In that quiet, rather snug, country garden she was as a stormy petrol from a world and a state of things hitherto only dreamed of. The beauty of clothes—Cecilia recognized the subtlety of their beauty with untrained but unerring instinct—were only a small part of a big revelation. There was the face, fine-featured, very arrogant in its expression of utter detachment, a calm unshakable defiance of every profound emotion. There were

the eyes, equally calm but bright with a little malicious light of mockery, and the tight-lipped mouth set in a line of caustic amusement. What Mrs. Deschesney's clothes were to the garden her face was to the vacant-eyed, round-mouthed country lights of Cecilia's circle of acquaintances.

"Father said you were modern," she answered at last. "He did not mean it as a compliment, but I do. I should like to be modern."

"As I am?"

"Yes."

"The ingredients necessary to my make-up are quite simple and are only three in number, good-looks, temperament and money," Mrs. Deschesney observed. "You have two of them."

"I haven't any money."

"That's a drawback. Money is everything."

"What about — "

"If you say 'love' I shall box your ears," said Mrs. Deschesney. "I can bear everything but humbugging triteness. Love is just a name we give to the highest form of egoism. It is a snare and a very bitter disillusion to anybody who believes it to be anything else."

"Did you ever believe it to be anything else?"

Mrs. Deschesney glanced down quizzically at the girl beside her.

"No," she said. "I have never been taken in. I flatter myself I have seen through most attacks on my intelligence."

"And you have been happy?"

"Cecilia, is this a new form of the Inquisition? In any case happiness doesn't exist. The moment we talk about it it is gone. I can only say that I have not been actually miserable. I have always had money, and money is freedom, and freedom is the one thing worth having."

"Yes," the girl agreed earnestly. "I should say it was."

She got up and drew her well-grown youthful figure to its full height. "If one could only find the money," she added regretfully.

"There are four methods," Mrs. Deschesney affirmed. "Either you steal, work, inherit or gamble. Now, the first is not respectable. No nicely brought-up girl is allowed to go in for the second and rarely has the luck to come in for the third. There remains gambling, which, translated into feminine lingo, means marriage."

"I see." Cecilia smoothed down her ruffled fair hair with a sudden and apparently reasonless attention to appearances. "I think I shall marry," she said. "— And go for a walk," she added as a disconnected afterthought. "Do you mind?"

"I mind nothing on earth," said Mrs. Deschesney, and picked up her book. Cecilia went as far as the garden gate. There she hesitated and came back to within a reasonable speaking-distance.

"I'm goint to ask more questions," she announced.

"My dear child, as long as it is nothing too complex — "

"It's about Heathcote St. John. You know him, don't you?"

"I know him and I knew his uncle. Why?"

"I want to know what you think of him?"

"I don't think of him. I understand, however, that he is what the novelists call a nice clean young Englishman. This means that he hunts, polos, plays at soldiers two weeks in the year, can spend other people's money and do most other things except work. Might I in turn ask why?"

"I'm thinking of marrying him—that's all," said Cecilia as she went out of the gate.

The vicarage garden looked on a pleasantly shaded lane along which she proceeded, humming to herself, her fair, hopeful, young face lifted to meet the sunlight as it fell between the leaves of the overhanging boughs. There was nothing in her expression or bearing to suggest that she either expected or intended anything, yet she showed no surprise but rather a calm businesslike satisfaction as, on turning the corner of the lane, she found herself face to face with a young man seated on the foot of a stile in an attitude of patient resignation. He was dressed in very immaculate riding clothes but the flanks of the tethered hunter by the gate-post suggested recent and very fast traveling. As Cecilia Hamilton approached, the young man sprang to his feet and advanced, hat in hand.

"Hullo!"

"Hullo, Mr. St. John!"

If the opening bars of their conversation sounded somewhat uninspired neither of them noticed it. They were both extremely serious.

"It was awfully good of you to come," the young man observed after a moment.

"Not at all. I'm afraid I'm late."

"It doesn't matter. I was rather glad of a rest. I've been in the saddle since midday." Somehow the information seemed to embarrass them both and Cecilia, as though to pass over an awkward admission, went up to the still hard-breathing chestnut and patted it with a perfunctory affection. Heathcote St. John followed her and stood a little behind her. More from nervousness than either foppery or necessity he had screwed an eye-glass into one languid blue eye, an addition which lent his small well-bred face an expression bordering on fatuity.

"I wonder if you got my letter?" he began abruptly.

She turned at once and looked at him with unfeigned surprise.

"Of course I did. I couldn't have come otherwise, could I?"

"No, of course not. That was only my way of opening the conversation. I'm sorry. I'm not very clever, you know, and conversation is my weak point. Not that I've got a strong one," he added humbly. "But I can write things better than I can

say them. That's why I sent you that letter." He waited a moment. "What did you think of it?" he asked.

There was a faint hesitation in the girl's manner —a something that amounted to wistfulness in her clear blue eyes as she looked past him into her own vista of the future.

"I thought it was rather a good idea," she said slowly.

"Really? How splendid of you!"

He took her hand and she made no resistance, only turned her grave regard to meet his eagerness.

"I only hope it is splendid."

"Why, of course it is—at least for me."

"That's what I'm not sure of. You see, I don't want to deceive you, Heathcote—I'd better begin to call you Heathcote, I think—I like you very much, a good deal better than any of the other men I know, which isn't saying much as I only know the curate and the squire. And I hate both of them. What I mean is—I don't love you."

"My dear girl—I don't expect — "

"Please listen, Heathcote. I want to explain quite fully. If I marry you—it won't be for your sake. It will be because I want to get away from here—from the stuffy moldy old village. I want to go into the world and be free—to enjoy myself, to be happy and not have to bother about anything or any living soul. I am almost glad"—the joyous enthusiasm in her voice died down to a

solemn assertiveness—"almost glad I don't love you. I am so tired of being serious. I am so tired of the Woman's Sphere. I want to get out of it and be just an ordinary human with no Sphere at all and no responsibilities and no duties. Honestly—it sounds horrid but I have to tell you—if you weren't rich I shouldn't marry you, Heathcote."

He looked at her with a pleasant untroubled smile.

"Of course not. If I hadn't been rich I shouldn't have asked you. I shouldn't have had the brazen-facedness to do it. But it's awfully nice of you to be straight about it. It encourages me to be honest too. Perhaps you'll be relieved to know that though I like you better than any one I've ever met I'm not—not desperately in love either?"

"It is rather a relief," she admitted candidly.

"I never have been," he added. "I'm much too easy-going. And don't suppose I should have ever thought of marrying either, only Uncle Jeremy wished it. I'm bound to do what Uncle Jeremy wishes, for very substantial reasons." He looked at her apologetically. "You're not angry?"

"Not in the least. It seems a very—practical arrangement all round."

"That's what I think." He was drawing patterns on the moist soil with the end of his hunting-crop and his pleasant voice sounded cheerful and contented. "Here we are—good friends, with the same tastes, both out for a good time, both ham-

pered with relatives and duties and troublesome things like that. If we join forces everybody will admit we have the right to do just what we like. And that's our ideal, isn't it? I promise you I shan't bother you with any Sphere, feminine or otherwise. We shall be free, and that's the chief thing."

"Free!" she echoed joyously.

Their eyes met. Hers were alight with a gay excitement not quite free from defiance which in the ensuing silence died down. Twilight had already begun to set in. They were both young, both good-looking and what with the sunset, their youth and the greatness of the occasion they were threatened into an inevitable wave of emotion.

"I hope I shall be able to give you an awfully happy time, Cecilia," he said less firmly.

"You're very good to me already, Heathcote."

He had her hand between both of his.

"Jeremy is going to give us twelve thousand pounds a year and a house in Portland Square," he said.

The wave passed on, leaving them high and dry. The house in Portland Square loomed up large and awe-inspiring and shut out the sunset.

"I don't know Portland Square," Cecilia said gravely, "but I am sure it's very pretty."

"And we can travel. We shall have a splendid time together."

"And not have to bother about anybody else," she said finally and triumphantly.

"That will be the best part of it." He took her hand and drew it through his arm. "It's a bargain. Let's go and tell the family."

CHAPTER II

THE MARRIAGE BARGAIN

THE telephone in the servants' hall, number — Portland Square whirred irritably. The butler, who had been warming himself before the fire, elevated his eyebrows in the direction of the buttons ensconced behind the latest number of *Chippy Cuts.*

"Your call, Augustus," he said with dignity.

"Ze master will 'ave 'is shaving water at once," came down the telephone in strenuous foreign accent. "'E 'ave much 'urry."

"Blow the little French frog!" exclaimed the youth Augustus. "Much hurry, indeed!" Nevertheless he disappeared with as much rapidity as his short legs allowed.

Five minutes later there was a second peal, considerably more insistent and vigorous than the first, though it did not appear to disturb the majestic butler in the least. This time his eyebrows signaled to the footman.

"You, I think, Adams," he observed.

The footman considered it beneath his dignity to hurry, and the jangle became so furious that the butler put his carefully manicured hand to his fore-

head with a pathetic movement of intense suffering.

"My dear fellow, if you wouldn't mind!" he expostulated wearily. "My nerves, you know."

"It's that minx, Marie," said the footman in high dudgeon. "No one but a woman would make such a rampage!"

The butler nodded.

"Ah, these women!" he sighed with a half-reproving, half-tender glance in the direction of a portly person who was poring over the day's menu. "These women!"

The cook appeared not to have heard, nor could it be said that she blushed, and the footman paid his attentions to the telephone, which in the meantime had become frantic.

"The mistress wants the carriage at twelve," he remarked presently, as he hung up the receiver. "Now where in the world is she a-gallivanting to, I wonder?"

"It won't be with the master, anyhow; you can take my word for it," said the buttons, who had returned from his mission with the shaving water. "They ain't said no more than 'Good morning' and 'Good evening' to each other for a week."

The butler frowned disapproval.

"Little boys should be seen and not heard," he said, but his rebuke came too late to stop the curiosity of the housemaid, who had torn herself away from a penny novelette in order to listen better.

"Have they been quarreling again?" she asked in an awestruck whisper. "Well, I never! Ain't that awful? And such a young couple, too!"

The butler laughed his most aristocratic laugh. It suggested that he did not think much of the housemaid's grammar.

"They don't quarrel," he said. "They haven't quarreled these two years. Much too blasé for that sort of thing, you know."

"What's blasé?" demanded the housemaid with increased respect. "What's it mean, Mr. Harrison?"

"It's French for 'fed up,'" the butler explained benevolently. "Fed up," he repeated with satisfaction—"that's what it means."

Further conversation on the subject was made impossible by a third indignant clamor on the telephone, which, as was immediately decided, it was obviously the duty of the buttons to answer. Being outnumbered, the buttons yielded ungraciously to circumstances, and announced the fact that "Master Harchibald was a 'owling 'isself 'oarse, that the missus was furious, and wanted to know what nurse was doing."

"Nurse is in bed," said the housemaid sulkily.

"Well, then you've got to go at once," retorted the buttons, feeling himself avenged.

"It ain't my business," snapped the housemaid, plunging back into the chronicle of Sir Richard and

Lady Angeline's love-affairs. "I'm not here to look after no children."

"And quite right, too!" broke in the portly person, evidently aroused from the consideration of entremes by a gust of indignation. "Don't you let yourself be sat upon, Susan! Slaves, that's what we are. What's the world a-coming to, I'd like to know, if we does more than we're paid to do?"

Nobody finding a satisfactory answer to this problem, the housemaid contented herself with the statement that she'd see herself at some incalculable distance before she bothered her head about anybody, and herewith settled the matter. A spirit of peace hovered over the servants' hall. The telephone ceased from troubling; the butler continued to grace the fireside, keeping a contemplative eye on the portly person who was by now busied with the question of a "to-be-or-not-to-be" in the matter of savories; the buttons disappeared behind his paper, and the housemaid sniffed luxuriously over Sir Richard's unhappy lot, at the same time comfortably conscious that church bells and orange blossoms would end his troubles and that the footman was watching her with respectful sympathy.

Up-stairs, too, all was apparent peace. Either Master Archibald's signals of distress had been smothered, or he had given up the attempt to obtain pity from a heartless world; at any rate no sound was audible, and boredom hung like a sleepy mist

over the solemn splendor. The very breakfast which was being kept warm by cunning silver contrivances in the dining-room seemed to be simmering in a state of sulky drowsiness. All this might have been attributed to the mere absence of human life but it must be admitted that when the folding-doors were thrown open and one proud clean-shaven individual in immaculate black ushered in another still more immaculate and frock-coated individual the general result was a visibly increased denseness in the atmosphere of profound boredom.

For a moment Heathcote St. John stood on the threshold and looked from one article of furniture to another as though the fact that they were still in their accustomed places at once amazed and depressed him. Then he seated himself wearily at the breakfast table and allowed himself to be waited on by his attendant, meanwhile arranging his eye-glass and considering his bulky correspondence with an expression of extreme languor. He had only just got up but he was very tired.

"Charles!"

"Monsieur?"

"Charles, there is no letter from South Africa."

Charles' expression betokened surprise and profound regret.

"Charles, why isn't there a letter? I have been expecting one."

The fact that his master should have to expect something that refused to come seemed to oppress

Charles with a strong emotion of mingled sympathy and indignation. His shoulders dropped deprecatingly.

"Perhaps by ze next mail, monsieur," he suggested as though trying to excuse a laggardly fate.

Mr. Heathcote St. John sighed and sipped his tea.

"Charles!"

"Monsieur?"

"What do I intend doing to-day?"

"Ze Carlton at twelve, monsieur."

"H'm, yes. Where is your mistress?"

The necessity of answering this new problem was taken from the much afflicted gentleman's gentleman. At that moment the side door opened as though impelled by a gust of wind, and Mrs. St. John entered in person.

At first glance it was difficult to find amidst the silks and dainty exquisite nothings the Cecilia of former years, the sunshine of a country parish and the regular if reluctant purveyor of beef tea to pauperized invalids. There was indeed a gulf of seven years between the two personalities. Mrs. Heathcote St. John had developed. It was not merely that she dressed differently or that a French maid had discovered a way of doing her hair to the best possible advantage. Her face had changed. It was prettier and also harder, still resolute and energetic in its expression but withal petulant and somewhat exasperated. All her movements were

vivacious and it was curious, therefore, that her entry had no substantial effect on her surroundings, which retained their English pomposity with unmoved vigor. If inanimate objects have feelings—and it is really difficult sometimes to suppose that they have not—it is certain that there was not a Georgian chair in that room that did not despise Mrs. St. John as an interloper. She was obviously frivolous and something of a parvenu; she did not appreciate or respect them and this they resented. They retaliated by forming a determinedly unsuitable background for her lighter fascinations.

As Mrs. St. John entered, her husband rose and bowed her a formal "Good morning," to which she responded by a gracious if not absent smile. Then both busied themselves with their breakfast and correspondence until such time as the dignified Charles had taken his departure. Then St. John looked up and considered his wife for a moment in troubled silence. She seemed engrossed in a document which had the appearance of a portentous bill, and only became aware of her husband's gaze after he had drawn her attention to it by a discreet cough.

"My dear," he began uneasily, "it hasn't come."

"It?" she interrogated with the same expression of affable indifference.

"I mean—the letter from Uncle Jeremy—in other words, his remittance hasn't come. 'Pon my word, it is most awkward. I am worried."

His face more than confirmed the statement, and

Mrs. St. John's affable smile disappeared as suddenly and a great deal more naturally than it had come.

"It must have been lost in the post," she declared.

"Most unlikely."

"Or he has forgotten. Tiresome man! How does he think we can manage?"

"I suppose he thinks that he allows us enough to cover over any chance delay, and 'pon my word" —he pulled his short fair mustache in supreme disconsolateness—"I suppose he does."

"Nonsense! It was he who wanted us to live in this place, and we have had to keep up our whole style in accordance. Heathcote, you must write to him and explain. You ought to tell him to send us the money through the bank in the ordinary way. It is humilating to be treated like children receiving their pocket-money. You must tell him—"

"My dear Cecilia, I can't! You forget, I have never seen him since I was a boy—we are complete strangers to each other. I haven't the right to lay down the law like that."

"Then you hadn't the right to marry."

St. John stared blankly across the breakfast table. In the first two years of their married life they had lived together in a pleasant 'live and let live' good comradeship, then for some inexplicable reason they had got on each other's nerves and for three years they had bickered incessantly. That occupation proving too exhausting, they had relapsed into a bored acceptance of each other's weaknesses. Now

it seemed they were reverting to phase two. In sheer distress Heathcote helped himself to a second egg.

"My dear, if you will excuse my saying so, that sounds as though you had married me for my money — "

"I did, Uncle Jeremy's money," she corrected.

"Well, then, Uncle Jeremy's money. It's all the same thing."

"It's not at all the same thing. If it was your money there wouldn't be all this fuss; and besides, then I shouldn't have married you for it."

"I don't understand," her husband complained fretfully.

"I did not expect that you would. I merely implied that if it was your money it would probably mean that you had earned it, and if you had earned it — "

"Cecilia, I honestly believe that you are reproaching me for not doing things."

"I'm not reproaching you at all."

"You are." He leaned back and drummed a melancholy tattoo on the table with his fingers. "And I dare say you are right," he added seriously. "An Englishman in my position has his duties toward his country. I might go into Parliament."

"Heathcote, how unoriginal! There are surely other ways of making a fool of one's self — " She caught a glimpse of his aghast face and sank back with a sigh of utter weariness. Possibly the re-

quest for immediate attention at the bottom of her bill had helped to exasperate her. "Heathcote, for pity's sake don't look at me in that idiotic way. I am not asking you to break stones for our daily bread—I know quite well you couldn't if I did. And besides there is no need. I dare say the money will come by the next mail, and we have credit enough. There, don't worry me any more. You make me too tired even to think, and I have so much to do. There is the dressmaker at twelve, Lady Dudley's luncheon party at two and Adelaide's dinner at nine. And Adelaide's dinners are simply exhausting. You have notorieties all round you and the strain of trying to appear intelligent on both sides at once and paying a reasonable attention to one's food — " Her voice ended in a smothered exclamation of horror. "Archibald, you naughty little boy, what are you doing here?"

St. John, successfully roused from his dreary contemplation of the teapot, looked up in the direction indicated by his wife's indignant finger, and beheld a spectacle rather ludicrous than terrible.

A small figure in an extraordinary assortment of garments stood in the doorway and gazed upon them with large eyes of wonderment and distress. It was not that the garments in themselves were anything unusual—they were, in point of fact, everything that a young gentleman's should be—but their decidedly back-to-front arrangement and the outspoken disagreement between the buttons and their

respective holes testified to the amateur hand. It was no wonder that Mrs. St. John exclaimed, and when she had taken in the full enormity of the situation she exclaimed again in a lower key:

"Archibald, what have you been doing?"

"Crying," the intruder answered with a faint pride.

"That was still naughtier of you. Where's nurse?"

"Dunno."

"You should know. Go and find her and tell her to dress you properly. You have no business to be here."

She gathered up her letters as she spoke, and appeared to forget his existence. Archibald St. John did not obey. He looked at her, and from her to his father. The latter's good-looking but languid features took on an expression of shamefaced sympathy.

"What's the matter, little chap?" he asked almost in a whisper.

"I'm five," said Archibald loudly and distinctly, but with a faint quaver in his small voice.

"Glad to hear it. That's a grand age. Nearly a man, aren't you?"

Archibald listened to his elder's platitudes with a pained disgust. There was even a sparkle in his eyes which would have warned both parents if they had known anything about five-year-old people—which they did not.

"It's my birthday," he said, and the quaver amounted to a break.

Husband and wife looked at each other, vaguely embarrassed.

The advent of this small and most surprising being into their lives had been a shock to them and had continued to be a shock to them at various intervals ever since. They were unfeignedly at a loss with it. It did not fit into their scheme of things. Occasionaly they felt aggrieved.

"It's my birthday!" The small voice persisted stubbornly.

"Nonsense!" said Mrs. St. John. "Nonsense!"

"And nurse said that everybody who was good got presents on their birthday," Archibald went on with the determination of despair, "and I was borned —nurse said so—and I am good." He made no offer to procure a witness to testify to this last statement—perhaps he looked upon it as incontrovertible—but two large tears rolled lugubriously down his flushed cheeks, thereby producing unexpected results. Mrs. St. John rose and rang the bell vigorously; her husband took out a gold piece from his waistcoat pocket and held it out with an awkward kindness.

"There, Archie," he said. "Run and buy yourself something for heaven's sake, and —"

"Don't be absurd, Heathcote!" the wife interrupted. "What can the child do with money? You are not tipping a waiter. Archibald, run away!

You'll see to-night—what's his name? Santa Claus —no, not Santa Clause—I mean, a fairy will bring you something lovely if you're good."

"Promise?"

"Yes, I promise."

She bent down to him to kiss him but in her hurry she missed his cheek and kissed air instead and swept off, as she had come, like a whirlwind of rustling silks and sweet-smelling perfumes.

Father and son stood and looked at each other in silence. Of the two, St. John was vastly the more embarrassed. Even after he had patted his tie and polished his eye-glass he found nothing particularly to say, and the tear-filled eyes fixed steadily on his face caused him a positive discomfort. In truth, this solemn unhappy atom of humanity was a stranger to him.

It had come into his life and he had accepted it on the whole with resignation. Occasionally, hearing and seeing with the world's eyes and ears, he had been vaguely proud of it. But it had no part in himself. It stood outside all his interests. He could not connect it with his horses, or his clubs, or his many friends, least of all with his wealth. In a way he was pleased to have a son just as he was pleased to have a pretty wife; they were agreeable appendages to show to a world which valued these things, but he, personally, did not need them or they him. And he certainly had no idea what he was supposed

to do with a crying child. Yet he felt vaguely guilty, and in his guilt he flew to the one resource that had never yet failed him in his intercourse with his fellow creatures. He once more produced a sovereign and pressed it into his son's sticky hand.

"There, little chap!" he said. "Ask nurse to buy you something nice with that—something you've been wanting."

"But the fairy will come, too?" Archibald asked doubtfully. "I should like it to bring me a rocking-horse."

His father either did not hear or did not understand. In any case, he was too self-occupied to bother.

"Of course, of course," he said.

"Promise?"

"I promise."

At that moment Heathcote St. John remembered his club appointment. Awkwardly enough, but with an attempt at kindly playfulness, he swung his small son into the air and placed him on the rug by the fire, thereby clearing his own passage to the door. Unfortunately, his playfulness was based on the supposition that five-year-old legs are of the steadiest, which they are not. Dazed by his sudden flight through the air, Archibald tottered and ended with an unpleasant bump against the fender. Naturally he cried—for the second time that morning—and it was a miserable sobbing bundle of miscel-

laneous garments which the housemaid found five minutes later when it occurred to her to answer her mistress' summons.

"Well, I never! If it isn't Master Archibald!" she said, and proceeded to remedy matters by shaking him like a small sack of potatoes. "Well, I never! What would the mistress say? What put it into your head to come down here, you naughty boy?"

"It's my birthday," he said drearily.

"Your birthday?" She considered him a moment, and possibly the pathos of the empty-handed little figure standing in the midst of a reckless luxury dawned upon her, for her peevish impatient expression softened. She picked him up more gently than was her wont.

"You're a grass orphan—that's what you are," she said as she bore him off. "I always says it."

"What's a grass orphan?" he queried anxiously; but the housemaid, still more than half engrossed in Sir Richard's and Lady Angeline's misfortune, did not consider it necessary to reply.

CHAPTER III

MISS ELIZABETH JONES

REFERRING to his engagement book, Heathcote St. John discovered that he had what he called a "hard day." At one o'clock he was due at the Carlton. There was no particular reason why he should be due there but in some vague fashion he felt that his presence at one of the club tables upheld the British Empire. After dinner he listened to various versions of that morning's Conservative leaders, livened by the daring ventures of some unorthodox spirit who had read "the other fellow's confounded lies," one or two reputations were dissected and proved valueless and by three o'clock, the British Empire being well established on its legs again, St. John slept the sleep of the just Englishman. At five he returned home and dressed for the evening. He took his time about it because there was really no great hurry. When he considered the matter closely there was really no hurry at all. It was even permissible to suppose that it would not have made any difference to the British Empire, Heathcote St. John or anybody else if the latter had never hurried or moved again. If St. John did not

linger on this possibility he was at any rate sufficiently conscious of the immense futility of things in general to feel himself extremely disinclined to fulfil his program. However, there it was as a last item, the name of an obscure music-hall in that region where East and West actually meet and rub shoulders. This was one of Heathcote's two great originalities—he did not go to the same music-hall every night. It divided him from his kind by an immeasurable gulf. He was ashamed of a divergence from the rut as all good Englishmen are and hid it under a bushel of much subterfuge.

Ten o'clock found him in the stalls of the Lincoln's Theater of Varieties. The performance was already half over but he had arrived in time for the ballet, performed by the "Lincoln's Special Beautiful Bevy." Heathcote sniffed the atmosphere with a languid distaste. If he had known what else to do with himself or if it had not been for the merciless engagement book he would have gone away. As it was, between despair and duty he sat firm and listened to the rapturous plaudits of the audience received by a curiously dressed gentleman with a violin who played the wedding march from *Lohengrin* in rag-time and wrung tears from the hardest heart by a complicated version of *Home Sweet Home.* Then came the ballet. Heathcote leaned forward with a faint light of genuine interest in his weary features. This was to him the greatest moment of his day, the secret intermezzo

in the appalling sameness of things. Eagerly he scanned each face of the whirling line of dancers. Behind the stereotyped smiles—significant of Heaven knew how much bitterness and contempt for the gapers beyond the footlights—he sought for a certain personality. The impertinent, challenging, haughty and indifferent, he passed by. Right in the background he discovered that for which he sought. She was the ugliest of them all,—so plain in fact that even in that place of inferiority she stood out as hopeless. The pink tights revealed painfully the thin legs, the bunch of impossibly-colored curls and heavy layers of paint could not conceal or lighten the misery of the pinched features. She smiled, and the smile was pitiable in its pleading for toleration, while her eyes had the hunted look of a hare with the dogs in full cry. Heathcote noted her appearance and position. As a rollicking sailor lad enflamed the valor of the gallery with a song in which Britain would not be something or other Heathcote got up and left the theater. Outside the stage door a messenger boy with a bouquet and an empty envelope awaited him. He seemed accustomed to the performance for he held the flowers while Heathcote slipped a five pound note into the envelope.

"Is that all to-night, sir?"

"That's all." He turned to the impassive doorkeeper. "I want to know the name of the girl in the back row on the outside left," he said.

"Don't know, sir. If you'd just step inside, sir,

there's a gentleman at the end of the passage who'll tell you, sir."

Heathcote hesitated. Anything not on the program invariably upset him. He would have liked half a day to consider a general readjustment, or better still to beat an instant retreat. But there was the doorkeeper whose heavy blue eyes expressed such a comprehending and sympathetic interest that to turn back seemed positively unfriendly. With an air of having done-this-sort-of-thing all his life Heathcote plunged into the murky atmosphere of the passage and guided by the flickerings of a distant gas-jet came upon the gentleman. The gentleman—a greasy individual, brightened by a diamond tie pin and a diamond on each small finger, was reading out names—and apparently sentences.

"Marie Alicia, fined a shilling for unpunctuality; two shillings for stain on dress as queen of the Elves — "

"'Tain't true—it's a bloomin' swindle—"

Marie Alicia swept out of the shadows like a tornado.

The gentleman went on with unmoved placidity:

"Sixpence for cheek. Makes three and six. Pay Marie Alicia, Mr. Johnson."

From inside the lighted doorway there came a grunt of assent, and Marie Alicia with a toss of her head passed through to the jingle of money.

"Next, please. Angélique Smith, a shilling for [illegible] nights' absence—"

He was interrupted by a shrill storm of protest and explanation. In the subsequent heated exchange of opinions in which docked sixpences proved the chief weapon of the defense, Heathcote had time to realize that the passage was lined by the now disengaged *corps du ballet,* still for the most part in their flimsy fineries. The members took up various attitudes, either leaning against the wall in scornful indifference for all things earthly or with the equal indifference of exhaustion. Most of them looked at Heathcote. From the moment that he became aware of the fact the wild desire for flight became panic. He turned hurriedly—

"Anything you want, sir?"

He pulled up short. It was the gentleman with the tie pin, grown suddenly affable, who had spoken. Heathcote smothered a mild profanity. But it sometimes happens that in moments of great stress we speak the truth and he found himself explaining that what he wanted was the lady in the back row, left outside. A wintry smile softened the gentleman's sphinx-like severity. Some one tittered.

"That's Lizzie Jones. Come along, miss, there's a gent to see you."

The titters became universal. They sounded like the mocking patter of rain-drops against a window and increased to a suppressed gusty laugh as Miss Lizzie Jones came out of her hiding-place. As Heathcote saw her face the ridiculous impulse to take to his heels subsided. She was already dressed

to go—very plainly and shabbily dressed—and she looked white with weariness. There was a timorous, almost apologetic wistfulness in her eyes that gave him an odd feeling of having swallowed all the dust in the passage.

"Is—is there anything you want?" she asked.

The laughter subsided to a lull of curiosity. Even the question of the week's salary was forgotten. Thirty pairs of cold inquiring eyes were riveted on Heathcote and the girl before him. Heathcote knew and burned with indignation.

"These are for you." He put the flowers into her mechanically outstretched hand. "I thought you would like them."

"For me? Are you quite sure you haven't made a mistake—they're not—for somebody else?"

"Quite sure."

The silence had been profound—awestruck. A deep wave of color mounted the girl's face and her lip quivered.

"They are very beautiful. Thank you."

Her voice was low but just a little common. Heathcote stood aside to let her pass and at the same time remembering his hat, removed it. In silence he followed her to the stage door where the individual of the bleary eye made obsequious way for him.

"Raining hard, sir. Shall I get you a taxi, sir?"

"No, thanks. My car is at the front entrance.

If you would call it around—" He hesitated and looked at the girl who stood a little in front of him, the flowers clasped in both hands, her eyes fixed with mute distress on the shining pavements. "You can't go home in that, Miss Jones," he said unexpectedly. She started and glanced round at him.

"I must. It will stop in a minute."

"I doubt it. Might I ask—have you far to go?"

"Hammersmith."

"My car will have you there in fifteen minutes."

"It's very, very good of you. But I couldn't take you out of your way like that."

Heathcote crimsoned violently. His intentions had been of a highly conventional and respectable order and the idea of accompanying her had not been among them. But there were her eyes—pathetic, and very frank and innocent in their gratitude.

"Nonsense!" he said hurriedly. "Why, it's not out of my way at all—I'd be delighted, you know—beastly night like this—"

He became slightly incoherent as he helped her into the waiting limousine. The doorkeeper's sympathetic smile and his chauffeur's expressionlessness alike embarrassed him. It appeared that in spite of himself he was being an exceedingly gay dog. "Beastly night!" he repeated desperately. She made no answer. For a minute or two he stared out of the rain-splashed window and took a profound, hitherto unknown interest in the names of the

streets. Then the silence got on his nerves. "You'd have got soaked through," he announced brilliantly. Still she was silent. In sheer desperation he turned to her. He saw that his envelope had been opened and that the five-pound note lay on her knees. That was the first thing—then he saw her eyes. The light from a street lamp flashed into them and they were full of dumb pain and bewilderment.

"Oh!" she said under her breath. "Oh!"

"'Pon my word," Heathcote began wildly. "I didn't mean it—'pon my word I didn't. At least, I did, only I didn't mean you to know—I—"

"I thought it was your card," she said in his helpless pause. "But there isn't even your name—"

"That's exactly it—you weren't to know—it was the worst possible luck that you caught me. If it had not been for that idiotic doorkeeper it would never have happened."

She looked at him gravely, the bank-note still between her limp hands. His distress and embarrassment gave her a little élan of self-confidence.

"Then—you often do that sort of thing?" she asked.

"Rather—every night. It's the one bit of pleasure I get after the day's toil, you know." He assumed a bluff air of confiding a business secret. "You see, this is the idea. I run round to one of these shows every evening—beastly bores most of them—and then I try and pick out some one

who looks as though she didn't like her job and ought to have a better time of it than she has and then—" His fluency failed him. "Well, then I try to give her a day off, as it were."

"I see, and you never give your name?"

"Rather not." He jabbed the eye-glass into an alarmed blue eye. "That would be rotten form, you know."

"Oh!" She was very quiet again. Heathcote, who was looking out with almost passionate interest for the name of the empty square through which they were gliding, did not perceive that a big tear had gathered and splashed down on the thin cheek. Suddenly he felt her wavering hand on his arm and when he turned with a nervous start the tear had been brushed away.

"I'm glad you've explained," she said earnestly. "At first I thought you meant to insult me—or something—but now I understand. After a hard day's work you try and find the poorest and ugliest and saddest of us all and give us a good time. You don't ask for thanks. It's a free gift—and I want to tell you—and I think it fine—splendid—"

"Oh, rot!" Heathcote protested unpoetically.

"It isn't rot. And I'm glad I know. I suppose you're very rich and people say such unkind things about rich people. But I've never really believed them. I know how hard money is to make and how envious and bitter people are, and I used to imagine

to myself a millionaire who spent his days digging the gold out of the hard earth as it were and every free hour making some one happier—less miserable. That was my dream. And when you spoke of the day's toil it all came true."

"'Pon my word!" The eye-glass dropped. He looked at her blankly. In the first instant the suspicion that she was laughing at him had been uppermost, but her eyes were too steady—too gravely trustful. "The day's toil!" To be taken seriously was really the funniest thing that had ever happened to him. Or was it funny? Wasn't it rather agreeable—after Cecilia's open distrust of any and all of his abilities? Should he disillusion this unfounded confidence? Should he tell her about Uncle Jeremy and the extra ten thousand pounds a year and the house in Portland Square—explain that "the day's toil" had been a euphonious way of describing profound slumbers in the club armchair? He compromised.

"You think far too well of me," he said. The phrase sounded familiar—a hall-mark orthodoxy and very safe. She shook her head.

"One gets to understand faces," she affirmed with a rather childish air of wisdom. "You look so tired. You have spent all the day worrying over papers, and terrible figures, and then you bother about a poor little chorus girl—"

"Oh, come, Miss Jones—" No further platitude presenting itself he modestly changed the sub-

ject. "By the way, what made these—the—ladies laugh so when I asked for you?"

She smiled faintly and the color ebbed into her white cheeks.

"You see—I'm the last row—and ugly. They only took me on because I was cheap and I could mend things—but no one has ever bothered about me. They thought—it was a—a joke—"

"Then they must have felt rather small," Heathcote declared fiercely. "Why don't you throw it all up if they're beastly to you?"

Her eyes opened wider with surprise and a faint reproach.

"You must understand that better than any one. One has to live, you know. And then I'm trying to save a little." The very faint tinge of the suburban twang in her voice was drowned with the quiet rising of a deep emotion. "You see, one day we perhaps—we—I shall marry."

"Yes," Heathcote agreed solemnly. "And that's a serious business, I can tell you."

"You—are married, too?"

"I should say so."

"Tell me—you are so kind and friendly, you won't mind my asking—were you poor when you married?"

"Well, much poorer," he admitted.

She nodded to herself.

"I'm glad. You see—I had always imagined it like that. Afterward—when one has money—one

can never be sure whether it was really love—" She gave a little nervous laugh. "I expect you think I'm awfully silly."

"Not a bit. I like it. And you're quite right, you know. Where there's money you really can't tell."

"How happy you must be!" she said under her breath. "And your wife. She must be very proud."

Heathcote found nothing to say. The idea of contradicting her had wholly evaporated. A strange emotion was stealing over him—a sort of content, an illusory self-satisfaction. This girl's belief in him was touching—it would be cruel to tell her the truth. And then—it was so pleasant to be believed in. For the moment he actually believed in himself. He patted her hand with a new confidence.

"You'll be happy, too, soon," he assured her pleasantly.

"I don't know. You see, we're so poor. He's a musician. He plays the piano—" Her eyes saddened. "I don't think he plays it very well but he loves it so and he has such faith. Somehow his chance doesn't come. He is always expecting it. He says it comes sometimes overnight. Does it?"

The question startled him into a half truth.

"Eh, yes, it does sometimes. It came to me rather like that."

"To you—but you are different. Yes, you are quite different."

Heathcote squared his shoulders. Her tone in-

ferred a subtle superiority on his side as compared to the unknown musician which was highly flattering. As the car swerved into a narrow side street and drew up with a contemptuous grunt before a dingy dwelling mercifully shrouded in darkness, Heathcote sighed. It had been an unusually agreeable evening. He opened the door for her.

"Is this the right house?"

"Yes—thank you so much." She hesitated and then stretched out an impulsive hand. "You'll take this back, won't you? I would rather—I shouldn't like—it was good of you. But you have given me my 'day off' already. You've given me hope, you know. When one sees how people win through as you have done—one can hope, can't one?"

Heathcote nodded. But he pressed the bank-note back into her hand.

"Please, keep it—as a wedding present. And look here, you must let me help you. I've got lots of influence, you know. I'm going to see what can be done. You mustn't thank me. You see, 'pon my word, I believe you've given me something, too."

"I—to you?"

He laughed gaily.

"A good opinion of myself. That's worth a good deal. It's almost as good as hope. Keep that bit of paper—to please me."

"And the flowers," she said, with an unsteady little laugh. "Or else to-morrow I shall think it all a dream."

"Good night, Miss Jones."

"Good night—"

"My name is Heathcote—Heathcote St. John."

"Good night then, Mr. St. John."

He watched her frail, shabby little figure until it lost itself in the murky shadows of the area steps. He was a benefactor and for an evening a great man. The fact that it was Uncle Jeremy who was engaged in the pleasant occupation of digging gold from the hard earth had practically passed out of sight. Heathcote stepped back into the waiting car with a new elasticity.

"Home, Richards!"

During the half-hour's drive Heathcote dreamed dreams. He had built a hospital, he had discovered a new method for making every one happy, he had stopped a runaway horse and was just saving a crowd of panic-stricken women from a burning theater when he suddenly remembered the rocking-horse. It was Archibald's birthday and he had forgotten. Also he had promised to fetch Cecilia from Adelaide's and he had forgotten that, too. And he realized with a keen pang how little both appreciated him.

CHAPTER IV

A GENTLEMAN FAIRY

THE nursery of number—Portland Square was perhaps the most luxurious room in the house. The St. Johns in their chronic state of panic where their son was concerned, had done all that money could do to atone for their own somewhat obvious deficiencies as parents. A well-known furnisher had been given orders to spare nothing and as a result there was not a patent, hygienic, scholastic or entertaining device which had not found a place in the lofty apartment. Patent chairs which never allowed their victims to drop into nice easy attitudes (so conducive to round shoulders); patent tables which could be adjusted to the increasing size of the user, unbreakable china, patent fire-guards, electric fans, mechanical toys of the most expensive sort—including a "real" bear which under pressure roared like a bull—these were among the chief items. The very wall-paper bore testimony to the profound study which has been given to the problem of "learning without tears." There were no ridiculous flowered patterns. The dado was ornamented with lively

scenes from English history. You started at the left-hand corner with the landing of William the Conqueror (1066) and ended at the right-hand corner with the crowning of George V (God save the King!) and a headache. It was really most unfortunate that young Archibald, for whom these advantages had been intended, did not appreciate them in the least. The pictures haunted him. In the middle of the night he would wake up to find William Rufus shaking a fiery head at him and Queen Elizabeth winking at him through the subdued glow of the patent electric night light. Then there was the bear. Archibald, who loved bear hunts of the most sanguinary character, had a confirmed dislike for bears. The amiable creature of his imagination, which he was wont to track round the legs of the dining-room table and which allowed itself to be shot dead at the first hint of alarm on the part of the hunter, had nothing in common with the grizzly monster placed by a well-intentioned nurse within easy reach of Archibald's patent bed. Archibald, being of gentlemanly disposition and realizing the good intention, never complained, but the conviction that the bear was only waiting for an unguarded moment to turn and rend the destroyer of so many of his kin was so strongly impressed on the destroyer's mind that it formed a large, if private, clause in the latter's evening prayers. Against all this, it must be admitted that Archibald's nurse and the friends of Archibald's nurse loved the room.

On the evening of his birthday they congregated round the patent fire-guard to celebrate. There was the under housemaid and the cook, the cousin of the cook and the nurse and the sister of the nurse. They liked Archibald's birthday cake immensely, and the cousin and the sister had both declared their intention of taking home a portion for other cousins and sisters. Archibald, who was a dear little boy, wouldn't mind, would he? Archibald, having been unexpectedly offered a second slice, and under the not unreasonable impression that everything belonged to cook, expressed himself as delighted. Then he and the ubiquitous bear were consigned to the left-hand corner with William the Conqueror and the real party began. For some time Archibald listened patiently. But the ways of mankind in general and of footmen in particular did not really engross him. His thoughts wandered. In the course of time they became daring, and in the end, choosing a moment when he was obviously forgotten, he pushed the bear respectfully on one side, ignoring William's admonishing eye, and slipped out of the nursery.

As may be imagined, this act of revolution had not been performed without serious premeditation. Archibald had his plan, and his plan led him straight to the drawing-room. It was still his birthday. No fairy had come, so far as he knew, and the drawing-room represented his last desperate hope. It had occurred to him that visitors were always shown into

the drawing-room, and that possibly the fairy had been waiting there all the afternoon. Moreover, it was a place of dainty intangible things—essentially like his mother—and surely most likely to attract fastidious persons as, he was certain, fairies were bound to be.

On the whole, it was a dangerous adventure on which he was bound. In the first place, the drawing-room was forbidden territory for him, except on such unpleasant occasions when he was brought in to be admired; in the second place, he had a strong aversion to the dark, and evening had already set in. The first matter he managed to persuade his conscience to overlook; the second was to some extent mitigated by the companionship of a fierce-looking tin soldier, calculated to inspire fear into the stoutest goblin heart. Thus he entered the drawing-room with a certain confidence, which changed suddenly to a mingled alarm and hope. A bright light burned at the far end.

If some older and consequently superior person had been present, he or she would instantly have discovered that the light came from a softly-shaded electric lamp, and would have told Archibald so, adding, as is the way with superior persons, that he was an absurd little boy to imagine absurd things. But no superior person was present, and so Archibald made up his mind that the light was a fairy one, and that his fairy visitor was somewhere close at hand. He looked breathlessly from side to side, and lo and behold! something freed itself from the

shadows and came slowly toward him—a something that was not a fairy, or else fairies were very different persons from what he had imagined. No; undoubtedly it was a goblin—one of his most dreaded enemies—and undoubtedly Archibald, in spite of the soldier, would have taken instant flight had not his legs, over which he had never the slightest control, made up their minds to stand there and shake. Under these trying circumstances there was nothing for it but to remain and observe the apparition closely. A superior person would have said "a retired greengrocer," but in spite of an ordinary and strikingly human check suit, Archibald knew that it was a goblin—a goblin in disguise, perhaps, but a goblin for all that. The short stumpy figure; the round red face, with the small deep-set eyes; the rather pointed ears; the wisps of disordered hair—all these characteristics were unmistakable. When it spoke, the matter was settled beyond doubt. It said "Humph!" and in a tone that sent Archibald's heart into the small space of his shoes.

"I—beg your pardon," he began feebly, but diplomatically, conscious that it is always best to be polite, even when on the point of being gobbled up—goblins and the verb "to gobble" were very closely connected in his mind—"I beg your pardon. Did you speak to me?"

"Not as yet," was the gruff answer; "but I intend doing so. Come here, young man."

The legs showing themselves complacent, Archibald walked forward—entirely against his own will

—and the goblin laid a thick thumb under his chin, tilting his face back to the light.

"Humph!" he said again. "What's your name, anyhow?"

"My name is Archibald," was the more composed answer; "Archibald St. John."

"Not much of a name. Haven't you got anything better than that?"

Archibald recognized this as a grown-up's form of pleasantry, and the recognition gave him courage. Even goblins had their human weaknesses, it appeared.

"Susan calls me 'Grass Orphan,'" he announced proudly.

"Eh?"

Archibald repeated the statement, though with trepidation. The goblin's "Eh?" had been terrific.

"And pray why?" was the next question.

Archibald looked about him as though he expected the answer to be lurking in a dark corner.

"I don't know," he said despondently. "Susan does, but she won't say."

The goblin was silent for a moment. Then he seated himself, and the firelight, playing on his face, revealed a decidedly grim expression.

"You seem pretty lonesome," he went on slowly. "Where are your folk?"

"Nurse is up-stairs," Archibald answered with an uneasy glance at the ceiling.

"H'm—never mind nurse. I meant—your pa
"

Archibald felt a small thrill of discomfort run down his spine. The "pa and ma" disagreed with him, but he supposed it was the correct thing among goblins.

"Father and mother are out," he said staidly.

"Together?"

"Oh, no!" very decidedly and very much surprised.

"Oh, no!" echoed the goblin, with an ironical twist of the eyebrows. "Humph!"

The "humph!" effectually put an end to the conversation for a moment. Archibald, whose capricious legs declared themselves weary of standing, seated himself cautiously on the footstool opposite the visitor. The latter studied him with knitted brows.

"I suppose you don't know that I have come a long way to see you, Mr. Grass Orphan?" he demanded abruptly.

"Me?" said Archibald with a movement of pleasure; "me?"

"Yes, you."

"Then—then perhaps you've come instead of the fairy?"

"Of the what?"

"Of the fairy," Archibald repeated with waning courage.

"I guess you'd better explain," the goblin said, and held his red hands to the blaze.

"You see, it's my birthday," Archibald began.

"I see. Lots of presents and tea-fights, eh?"

Archibald shook his head. He had no idea what a tea-fight was like, but it sounded dangerous.

"Oh, no. You see, the fairy who brings the presents didn't come in time. I think—I think"—his voice wavered somewhat—"father and mother must have forgotten to tell her—him—it."

"And you think I'm the fairy; is that the idea?"

Archibald's eyes opened to quite twice their natural size.

"Oh, no! You couldn't—I mean—I thought—I thought you were a goblin," he stammered, thoroughly alarmed at his own rudeness.

The visitor threw back his head and laughed till his red face grew purple and all Archibald's fears returned with double force.

"So I'm a goblin? Bless my soul—well, and suppose I am? Goblins can do as much as fairies any day."

"Can they?" asked Archibald politely, thankful that the matter had passed off so pleasantly. "I'm so glad."

"And suppose I came all this way to ask you what you wanted, what would you ask for?"

Archibald's face grew grave. There was a vague wistfulness about his expression as he looked away from his questioner to the fire.

"Can you give me anything?" he asked.

The goblin's lips compressed themselves into a grim line.

"I can give you most things that human folk want," he said.

"Then, please, I should like a rocking-horse, and my father and mother to be awfully, awfully fond of me—specially mother."

The goblin sat back in his chair. His jaw had dropped.

"Aren't they?" he demanded.

"Oh, no."

"Too—too fond of each other to bother about a little bit of a thing like you, eh?"

"Oh, no."

"They're not? Why not?"

Archibald gathered together all Susan's and his nurse's wisdom.

"They're too—too blasy," he explained.

"Too what? What the devil is 'blasy'?"

"Fed up," Archibald said with some pride. "Fed up, you know."

The goblin made a sound that might have passed for a grunt or a groan. His eyes wandered round the beautiful room, and hardened.

"So you want your folk to be fond of you?" he said. "Why specially your mother?"

"Because she kisses one so nicely," Archibald explained. "She smells so 'spensive, you know."

"I have not the least doubt," the goblin admitted with a grim sniff. He waited a moment, studying the pale, tired baby face before him. Then he got

up and laid one heavy hand on the frail, frail shoulder. "Perhaps I can give you what you want," he said. "There was a time—six years ago—when I gave your folk what they wanted, and it doesn't seem to have done them much good; but maybe you want something wiser than they did. At any rate, I'll try. Only"—his face relaxed somewhat—"I'm not a fairy, as you quite rightly decided. I'm only a goblin after all. Fairies wave their hands and the job's done. Goblins have to go about their work slowly. And you'll have to help—yes, you," he repeated as Archibald looked at him in wide-eyed surprise. "You'll have to give up things, presents, nice clothes, nice food, nurse and everything. Can you?"

"Oh, yes!" said Archibald, thinking chiefly of the nurse. "Oh, yes, yes!"

The goblin smiled faintly.

"Well, we'll see. You must trust me, d'ye hear? And you're not to say anything about me. You're not to say you know me next time we meet. It's a secret between us. Do you understand?"

"Yes," said Archibald. It was past his bedtime, and the world swam in a red glow before his hazy eyes. He had a dim recollection of a kindly pressure on the shoulder, of a thick-set figure bending over him. Then all vanished, and he rolled off his stool on to the rug—asleep.

CHAPTER V

AN ANGEL FROM HEAVEN

"WELL, and how is everything working out?"

"Splendidly, thanks."

"You look tired, Cecilia."

Mrs. St. John looked at her hostess and then around the crowded drawing-room as though fearful of being overheard. The precaution was unnecessary, as the noise prevented any one from hearing anything.

"My dear Adelaide, I am tired. You gave me a very tired young man for dinner and we worked upon each other to an extent that by the entrees we were both torpid with exhaustion. Do you know, I believe we're a tired-out generation. Everybody I know is tired—except you, perhaps. Heathcote is. I want to yawn every time I see him, and I dare say that's his feeling toward me."

"Yet you said everything was working out splendidly?"

"Oh, it is. We both have all we want—and a great deal more."

A rather ironical smile quivered at the corners of Mrs. Deschesney's severe mouth. Altogether she was in a severe mood, which matched admirably the severe elegance of her whole appearance. Nobody had ever seen Mrs. Deschesney fashionable in the accepted sense of the word, which perhaps explained the general belief that she was always well-dressed.

"I wonder what you mean by 'a great deal more'?" she questioned grimly. "Baby Archibald, perhaps?"

Mrs. St. John laughed.

"Oh, Archibald!" she said. "Archibald could scarcely be 'a great deal' anything, could he?"

"I don't know. To tell you the truth, Cecilia, I'm not sure I don't like Archibald a great deal better than either you or Heathcote."

Mrs. St. John's eyes twinkled with reawakened animation.

"Oh, of course, you do, Adelaide. Archibald isn't old enough to contradict. You will always notice that very self-willed, autocratic people love children and animals better than all the grown-ups put together. And you love children, don't you?"

"You are still very impertinent, Cecilia," Mrs. Deschesney retorted. "I really believe some women simply marry in order that they can be rude to their elders and betters. Now, would you mind sitting down and not talking?"

"And pray why?"

"Some one is going to play."

"The piano? But that's no earthly reason why I should stop talking. You're so old-fashioned, Adelaide——"

"I dare say, Cecilia, but if I have any authority you will sit down."

Mrs. St. John sat down. She chose the most comfortable corner of a settee and arranged the cushions to her satisfaction.

"It's really very difficult to shake off the sort of feudal tyranny of one's childhood," she complained. "And my silence will make no appreciable difference. Just listen! It's almost as good as being in the stalls at Covent Garden. Who is the protégé this time, Adelaide?"

"His name is Harold Simpson. Not very euphonic, is it? I wanted him to change it, but he won't. He should interest you. He is a musician and not tired. He is making a big fight—from direst poverty to—I really don't know what. This is one of the steps upward for him—or so he thinks. But I doubt it. No one will listen to him, though every one knows his story. It is typical of English people that they weep maudlin tears over newspaper romances and pass by the real tragedies of life with dry eyes, deaf ears and closed pockets. Now be quiet."

For a wonder, Mrs. St. John obeyed. Her fair, still girlish face had lost its unnatural expression of boredom and her eyes widened with something very like genuine interest as they rested on the man

who had unobtrusively taken his place at the piano. There was a slight lull as his hands touched the keys—a rather petulant lull as though the well-dressed crowd of men and women were aggrieved by an unwarrantable interruption. Beyond the first chords Cecilia St. John heard very little more. The hum of voices predominated, and only here and there a crescendo burst through the intervening sound. Yet Cecilia remained intent. The man interested her just as Mrs. Deschesney's chance phrase had arrested and held her volatile attention. "A big fight!" That sounded new in her ears. It was a surprising thought that anybody fought for anything, and least of all this man. He did not look like a fighter after preconceived ideas. If he did not actually wear long hair, he had all the other attributes of the artist vide the comic press. He was thin, long-limbed, shabby, and his gaunt clean-shaven face bore an expression of hungry intensity which to the well-fed is always ridiculous. The tired young man who had partnered Cecilia through a seven-course dinner drifted back to her and giggled languidly into her ear.

"Stupid, isn't it? I suppose he's brought here to keep us from crass materialism or prove how cultured we are, or something. What a queer-looking chap! Couldn't be anything else but a musician or something odd like that—could he? Let's pretend he's not there, and talk sense. What's your handicap, Mrs. St. John?"

Cecilia started, and after a quick survey of her neighbor's features sighed.

"I do not play golf," she said wearily. "I told you that at dinner."

"So you did. I forgot. Every one plays golf nowadays, don't they?"

"I believe so."

"I expect, indeed, that a great general will tell the future generations that we beat the Germans on the putting greens of St. Andrews," Mrs. Deschesney put in acidly.

Cecilia laughed and took the opportunity to make her escape. The musician's hands had fallen from the keys—it was the only recognizable sign that he had ceased playing—and for a moment he sat motionless with bent head as though listening to the echo of things heard only by himself. Then he got up amid a perfunctory applause and crept away awkwardly enough into the shadows of the conservatory.

Mrs. St. John hesitated. She saw, out of the corner of her eye, that she had already been signaled out by the multitude of her acquaintances, and with an expression of innocent ignorance as to their intentions, she turned her back on the most aggressive. She was not very sure as to her own intentions and their merits. But she was feeling a little less indifferent than usual—a kind of adventurous curiosity seized her, and she was not the person to deny herself a diversion at whatever cost.

"Mrs. St. John——"

Mrs. St. John smiled vaguely in the opposite direction and with an air of profound aloofness entered the conservatory.

It was all but deserted. Only the musician sat by the miniature fountain with his head between his hands. He did not hear Mrs. St. John's approach until she was quite close to him. The soft rustle of her dress mingled with the murmur of the falling water and he started and looked up.

Mrs. St. John smiled at him with the complete assurance of conscious beauty and the audacity of a great wealth. It had never occurred to her to doubt the effect of her sudden appearance on the man, and even if she had the doubt must have been instantly dispelled. Mr. Harold Simpson sprang to his feet.

"I beg your pardon——"

"It is for me to apologize," Mrs. St. John interrupted pleasantly. "I am afraid I startled you. But I wanted to speak to you."

"To me?"

"Yes." She nodded gravely. "I somehow felt that just clapping hands did not quite cover my debt of gratitude to you. I never heard anybody play like that before. It was wonderful."

"I did not know any one could hear me," he retorted with uncontrollable bitterness.

"*I* heard you," said Mrs. St. John. She seated herself under a big palm tree and motioned him to

take the place beside her. She was now enjoying herself for the first time that evening. The man beside her was trembling with a real pent-up emotion.

"You are very good," he said under his breath.

"Good? Why? Because I am grateful? Besides, Mrs. Deschesney has been telling me about you and the brave fight that you are fighting against circumstances—I believe that interested me more even than your playing." Conscious of speaking the truth for the first time, her voice deepened. "It's so rare, you know," she added.

"Fighting?" he asked. Then as she nodded he laughed curtly, his thin nervous hands tightly interlinked. "No, it's not rare," he said. "It's the commonest thing on earth."

"Oh—I didn't know," she said cheerfully. "Nobody I know fights. They play—games."

"They would," he admitted.

Her eyes twinkled delightedly.

"I expect you despise us all frightfully, don't you?"

"I may have—I was feeling bitter—I don't now."

"Oh!" She was silent. The young man was evidently more impressionable than she had expected. She had given way to a kindly curiosity, and he was gazing at her with burning eyes of unconcealed gratitude and admiration.

"I knew that it was wrong of me to be bitter,"

he went on energetically. "I knew that somewhere in the crowd there must be some one who heard and understood. And I was right. If you listened—if you understood—why, then it is all worth while—then I can not be bitter about anything any more." He smiled at her with an enthusiasm which took her breath away. "You don't know what it means to an artist," he said, "to feel that some one in one's audience cares to try and find out what one is trying to say—that alone is almost inspiration. I—I envy you. You have such power—you and all these others. You have the power to make hundreds of poor devils like myself happy—and to give hope and courage to others seems to me the most wonderful music in the world. But those others don't care. They have the power, but they won't use it. That's why we, in the bitterness of our hearts, despise them. But you are different. You make—almost—an unjust system just. You almost justify it."

"Oh!" Mrs. St. John said blankly. But a warm color crept into her cheeks. It was a physical impossibility to listen to this man's earnest convictions—much less to look into his wan eager face, without being moved and flattered. Mrs. St. John was both. She had started out without any particular idea except that of passing the remainder of a tiresome evening as agreeably and as far away from her dinner partner as possible, and here she was be-

ing explained to herself as a beneficent spirit doling out gifts of inspiration to the thirsty and needy. It was a beautiful vision. In the first flush of amusement Mrs. St. John had liked it better than any fancy-dress costume she had ever worn, but now it fitted her so well that she was beginning to consider it seriously.

"You think far too well of me, Mr. Simpson," she said in a tone of gentle protest. "I am a very ordinary mortal, after all."

"It is not ordinary for the beautiful and happy to remember those less fortunate," he answered bluntly. "You—your encouragement has helped me more than I can say. It gives me hope to go on."

"Won't you tell me—about things?" she asked.

It was all most unusual. They had not even been introduced and he wore the shabbiest evening clothes that she ever remembered seeing. He sat there and told her the story of his life. The strangest part of all was that she listened, and that once or twice she had to put a minute Brussells lace handkerchief to her eyes and prevent an inexcusable tear making havoc of her complexion. It was quite a simple affair in its way—a long record of patient climbing, of struggle in the face of poverty and illness and discouragement. (He had been a greengrocer's assistant originally and was possessed of a weak lung) and through it all there ran the pale thread of a love story. This he barely indicated. She was

"something on the stage" he said and Mrs. St. John imagined her a blowzy, painted, illiterate creature of the music-halls—and shuddered.

"When my luck turns we shall marry," he said at last half to himself.

"You must not handicap yourself too early in the fight," said Mrs. St. John very wisely.

"I don't think she would ever handicap me." He took out a shabby pocketbook and handed her a photograph with shy deference. "Would you like to see her?"

There was a moment's silence. Mrs. St. John looked at a face almost as thin and care-worn as that of the man beside her, into eyes that burned with the same feverish intensity. It was not a beautiful face. For the first time in her life Mrs. St. John sought vainly for something to say.

"She is very good," Mr. Simpson observed gently.

"Yes, I—I suppose she must be."

He took the photograph back and slipped it jealously into his pocket. A deep flush crept over his features.

"Of course—she is not a grand lady. We are both rather common folk. I—I had forgotten."

"There is nothing to forget. Art ennobles everything, doesn't it? Mr. Simpson, have I hurt your feelings in any way?"

She was genuinely surprised and distressed as he rose violently to his feet.

"No, no, not you—I have hurt myself. I *had* forgotten. Beautiful things fascinate, bewilder me. It seemed to me just for a moment that I belonged to all this—that I had the right to talk to you—and I am only a third-rate unknown musician who might be replaced any day by a pianolo and no one know or care — "

"You must not say that. It's not true. And I want to ask you—won't you bring your—your fiancée to see me? We might talk things over." She was seized by a sudden inspiration. "Couldn't we hire the Albert Hall or something?"

"For me?"

"Why not?—or the Queen's Hall or anything you liked?" She held out her hand. "Will you come?"

He stared at her blankly, incredulously. There were tears in his eyes. Then he caught her hand and lifted it to his lips.

"You are an angel from Heaven—" he stammered.

It was at that crucial moment that Heathcote, heated and belated, made his appearance at the entrance of the conservatory. He ejaculated "Cecilia!" in sheer consternation at the spectacle before him and his eye-glass dropped. Mrs. St. John turned.

"So you really have come, Heathcote," she said pleasantly, if rather wearily. "How nice! May I introduce you—Heathcote, this is Mr. Simpson, Mr. Simpson—my husband! Mr. St. John."

Both men bowed. The only thing that struck Mr.

St. John was the cut of Mr. Simpson's trousers which he thought was unusual. He offered his wife his arm.

"If you are ready, Cecilia—"

"Quite ready. Mr. Simpson, Mrs. Deschesney will give you my address. You will come—I have your promise?"

He made no answer. It must be confessed that he cut an ungainly, rather ridiculous figure as he stood there gazing vacantly after her. Only the entrance of a footman brought him back to earth.

"If you please, Mrs. Deschesney's compliments, and would you give the company a concertino before you go, sir?"

The footman, who had a great contempt for musicians in general, considered that this particular specimen had gone mad. Mr. Simpson smiled joyously. He threw up his hands like a man suddenly released from an oppressive burden.

"Tell Mrs. Deschesney I will play all the nine symphonies to her!" he exclaimed and strode back to the drawing-room with the erect head of a conqueror.

CHAPTER VI

THE LITTLE TIN SOLDIER

THE St. Johns sat well back in the opposite corners of their carriage. For ten minutes they had not spoken to each other. It was an unwritten but recognized article of their code that interference of any sort either as regards general conduct or friends or expenditure was strictly illegal, and the arrangement had worked too well for either to venture on a deviation. Theirs had been, not a *mariage de convenance,* but a carefully drawn-up bargain between two sane level-headed people anxious to make the best of life, each in his own way, entirely irrespective of all criticism and safe in the knowledge of each other's sanction. It was perhaps because the London season was drawing to a close that they were unable to maintain the usual attitude of complete detachment.

From her side of the carriage Cecilia found it increasingly difficult to ignore her husband, much less forget him. His presence jarred on her. It was in vain that she switched out the electric lamp. He remained irritatingly obvious and what was worse, irritatingly magnetic. She was compelled to look

at him. Hitherto, if she had been asked to describe him she would have fallen back on Mrs. Deschesney's original catalogue of adjectives—"a nice clean, ordinary Englishman"—and might have added "good-looking." At the present moment he struck her as positively ugly. As he stared out of the window the passing lamp-lights flashed on his small pale face. His mouth was slightly open; it gave him an expression that in another mood she might have passed over as tired, but which now struck her as nothing short of idiotic.

"Heathcote!" she began sharply.

He turned to her at once. If he had nothing else to recommend him he was at least unfailingly polite.

"Anything wrong?"

"No, no. I only wondered—" The sheer uselessness of things silenced her impulse. "Had a good day?" she asked instead.

"Fair. Carlton for lunch. Politics, of course, all the afternoon. The Lincoln after dinner."

"Good show?"

"Oh, fair, rather boring."

This verbless exchange came to an end. By the exercise of her full will-power Cecilia managed to divert her own attention to the streets. The insane desire to get up and shake the man opposite her, to knock his immaculate hat from his immaculate head and thereby rouse him to some semblance of animation had been almost overpowering. It had been restrained chiefly by the certainty that even

these extreme measures would not have had any appreciable effect. Heathcote was never roused. His was the placidity of the brook that flows on untroubled in the midst of hurricanes. He glanced at her now with a faint curiosity.

"By the way, Cecilia, who was that queer-looking fellow you were talking to in the conservatory?" he asked.

"I told you—Harold Simpson. He is a great musician."

"With that name? Well, I take your word for it. I never saw such a queer get-up though—"

"Heathcote, you think of nothing but appearances!" she lashed out at him.

The attack was so sharp and unexpected that he stared at her aghast, and catching a glimpse of his astonished face she laughed nervously. "I'm sorry, Heathcote. My nerves are all on edge to-night."

"I never knew you had any," he said, "anyhow, it doesn't matter. I didn't mean to annoy. Personally I don't care a rap what the fellow wears. His trousers may be a symptom of genius for all I know."

She made no answer. The impulse to tell him something of that poor heroic life faded. He would not have understood. He would have seen nothing but the shabbiness, the ridiculous side of it all. There was a ridiculous side. She could not help seeing it herself. Harold Simpson was himself ridiculous. His lanky angular figure, which seemed to jut out

in points through the ill-fitting clothes, was an object of caricature. And yet he fought. The doggedness of his unequal struggle with adversity thrilled her. At least he did not sit idle with his hands full of another's money and spend his days and nights in the languid pursuit of languid pleasures. If he was shabby and ridiculous he had at least the energy and cult of a man. Mrs. St. John laughed under her breath, having come suddenly to the realization that she was making comparisons. She was also criticizing where she had no right to criticize. "We're one just as bad as the other," she told herself. But of course she did not really think so—nobody ever does. What she really thought in the hidden recesses of her mind was that "if things had been different" she would have been different. And under "things" was understood, of course, that man who sat opposite her. Mrs. Heathcote turned her tear-filled resentful eyes to the rain-splashed streets. For the first time in her life she dreamed. She was fighting heroically through poverty and misfortune at the side of a great man. She imagined a dozen highly dramatic episodes in which she figured with conspicuous success as a dauntless self-forgetful wife and devoted mother. In the last act, where the great man made his maiden speech in the House amid frantic plaudits won from both sides and money poured in from a source which she did not bother to discover, Mrs. St. John found herself completely in her element. The rest of the drive home was

pleasantly occupied in the designing of an evening dress for the great man's first political reception so that by the time they reached Portland Square there was nothing lacking to the realization of her dream except the great man.

His makeshift remained unobtrusive in his corner of the carriage. He was feeling injured. Being a man and of less critical faculty he was not quite certain why, but the episode of the musician had vaguely annoyed him. It was part of the code that friends on either side were not to be criticized but at the same time Cecilia's habit of picking up low acquaintances merely because they flattered her was in the highest degree objectionable—almost as objectionable as her frankly low opinion of himself. He knew that she despised him and there had never been any secret as to the reason of their union. Until this evening it had not bothered him; now it seemed both wicked and unjust. What reason had she to despise him? If he was given a decent chance —burning theater, runaway horses and other world-shaking catastrophes—he would be able to prove himself. Other people respected him (he remembered the grave admiration in the little ballet-girl's eyes with a pleasant softening of the heart). He imagined Cecilia's grief and remorse as they brought in his charred and shattered corpse (according to the catastrophe) and the poignancy of the little ballet-girl's tear-choked declaration. "I always knew what he was worth." The whole situation was so

exciting and touching that he was quite annoyed when the carriage drew up sharply to find himself both alive and unmourned.

The St. Johns bade each other a more than usually formal good night at the foot of the stairs. Mr. St. John retired to his smoking-room, Mrs. St. John to her boudoir. Of the two Mrs. St. John was the better pleased with herself. She had had a socially successful day spiced with a good deed and a new form of homage for qualities which hitherto she had not found it necessary to possess. Even the announcement by her maid that her husband would be glad if she would speak with him for a moment in the library did not seriously disturb her. She thought the request rude and inconsiderate, but then Heathcote was more or less capable—or incapable of anything.

As she entered the library her husband's back was turned toward her and he did not move or for a moment speak. His influence did not annoy her. In the whirl and brilliancy of her life his admiration for her—if he had ever felt any—had long since lost all value.

"What is it you want, Heathcote?" she asked fretfully. "You know, it is really thoughtless of you to bother me at this time of the evening. I am so tired that I—" She broke off in the middle of the sentence. Her husband had at last turned toward her, and his face had startled her out of her self-absorption. It was strangely pale; the expression

of foppish boredom was gone, and there was something almost childish in the hopeless wretchedness in his eyes.

"I asked you because I had something of the greatest gravity to tell you," he said hoarsely. "I am sorry to trouble you, but it won't wait. I've had a letter from Uncle Jeremy's bank—there, you had better read it for yourself." He held out an open sheet of business paper, and as she took it she saw that his hand trembled.

"I don't understand," she said with the fretfulness of a vague fear. "I hate business. Why can't you tell me yourself? Only, be quick. I'm too tired to stand about waiting."

"It's very simple," he said, passing his hand unsteadily over his disordered hair. "Uncle Jeremy is ruined—and we have nothing more to expect from him. That's all."

She staggered—then took refuge in a blind refusal to understand.

"Nonsense!" she said. "Nonsense! you are dreaming."

"I wish to heaven, I were!"

His tone convinced her. She came slowly forward, the soft rustle of her dress sounding loud in the absolute stricken quiet.

"You mean—we are ruined, Heathcote?"

"That's it."

"But the house—our things—?"

"There are our debts to pay. All we have won't cover them."

"Penniless, then—what the world calls paupers?"

"Yes—paupers," he echoed dully.

She stretched out her hand as though to cling to him for support, but he did not see the movement, and she caught hold of the mantel-shelf. The marble seemed only to accentuate the whiteness of the small hand, and she looked at the glittering rings upon her third finger with a dazed unbelief. From them she looked at the room, at the costly brocaded furniture, at the valuable paintings, and then down at her own dress. Paupers! The word rang in her ears with a mockery that made her whole surroundings seem ludicrous. Everything was ludicrous—horrible. There was nothing in common between this unpleasant reality and the richly-painted canvas of her imaginary catastrophes. If the great man had been there then perhaps—she looked finally at her husband, and a bitterness that was not far from contempt twisted her pale lips.

"What are you going to do?" she asked curtly.

He shook his head.

"Heaven knows! I shall manage somehow, I suppose. Of course—you will go home—to your mother."

A scarlet wave of color rose to her cheeks.

"Of course," she said coldly. "What else did you expect me to do?"

"Nothing—nothing." He turned away without lifting his eyes to her face. "Cecilia, please excuse me to-night. I must think matters over. It's a—a good thing you have a place where you can go."

She gave a short hard laugh.

"Yes, it's a good thing," she said. Then suddenly she bent down and picked up some glittering object on the floor. It was the tin soldier, a little more bent and battered than before, but quite recognizable. Husband and wife looked at it in a silence which became oppressive. Mrs. St. John turned and went slowly toward the door. The tin soldier was still in her hand.

"Good night," she said.

"Good night."

The door closed behind her, and Heathcote St. John was left alone to face the first catastrophe of his life. Curiously enough he did not think of that —he thought of the tin soldier. And the tin soldier set fire to a new train of thought. Involuntarily he looked at the clock. It was well past eleven. At this hour five years ago he had been called to his wife's bedside, and beheld the minute object which they told him was his son. His son!

Like faint but growing vibrations from a great hour he felt again the almost agonizing relief after the racked suspense, the passing pride. That night had witnessed a big hour in his life—for the first time a big emotion had swept over him and something not unlike love had risen supreme above

other consideration, above wealth and luxury and pride of place—for the first time and for the last! Then had come the magnificent gifts from magnificent friends, proud Uncle Jeremy's "extra check," and then once more the waves had closed over their heads and they had forgotten. To-night he remembered—now that the waves had rolled back, leaving him on a rock of naked ruin. His hundred and one luxuries had been swept away from him; all that remained were his wife and child, and they, too, were lost because he had never really possessed them and had never earned the right to keep them. He was dazed to find that he cared—before he had cared nothing or very little. It hurt him that she had turned away from him like that in the bad hour. If she had held out a hand—even only a hand of comradeship or of sympathy, then it might have been bearable—he might have even risen to the height of the situation. But like this with no bands playing, no applause, no audience, not so much as an admiring ballet-girl—he remembered the latter with a shock. What would she have said and done? She would have smiled bravely at him. "You have fought through so splendidly—you will fight through again." And then he would have had to have told her. "But I have never fought through or for anything in my life. I have never been splendid—except on some one else's money." And then she, too, would have turned away from him.

Heathcote smothered a groan. If only Cecilia

had been different! But of course she did not and could not care for him. She had married him for the wealth that was gone, and she would go, too. There was no other link between them. Or was there perhaps? He remembered Baby Archibald. But then Baby Archibald did not and could not care either. His child had been a mere episode in his life and he had treated it as such. He stood alone, a pauper stripped of every possession that made life beautiful.

Without knowing what he did, he switched off the light, that revealed to him all the splendor he had lost, and crept softly from the room. He did not know why he went on tiptoe nor why he sought out a part in the great house which he had not once visited in four years. He was only conscious of a dull pain and an inexplicable longing. The nursery door stood ajar, and a faint light shone through the narrow space on the dark passage. He wondered at it, and half drew back, but the pain was stronger than himself. The door answered quietly to his touch, and the next minute he stood on the threshold. He went no farther, the scene before him held him rooted and wordless. A shaded lamp burned on the table, and by its light he saw the small white bed by the wall—and his wife. She stood there with her hand resting on the pillow, very upright, a vision of the world's luxury, with a face on which pride and grief and bitterness strove for the victory.

With an effort, Heathcote drew slowly nearer, and stood opposite her with the child between them. He had never seen emotion on his wife's face before —or only once, in the hour which they had both forgotten; and it was like a revelation, like the revelation of his own pain. In sheer awkwardness he bent down and touched the boy's cheek lightly with his finger. He felt that it was moist—as though a tear had fallen—but the closed eyelids were dry.

"Cecilia!" he said unsteadily.

She threw back her head with a movement of self-defiance.

"It was his birthday," she said, "and we forgot."

Their eyes met, and the same thought flashed through the minds of both. It was his birthday—the last birthday on which they could have poured wealth and happiness over him. And they had forgotten.

"Poor little chap!" Heathcote said under his breath.

A rough, half smothered sob broke the stillness. He looked up at her again in stricken surprise, and saw that her face was set in rigid expressionless lines. But the sob had been unmistakable. Was it self-pity or remorse? He did not know but obeying an imperative impulse, he came round to her side.

"Cecilia!" he repeated hoarsely. He took her hand, and she did not withdraw it. Rather he felt that she clung to him.

"Cecilia—it's hard on you—I'm awfully sorry," he stammered.

Then she broke down and flung herself by the little bed in an overwhelming passion of grief.

"Poor little fellow!" she cried wildly. "I promised him—and I forgot—and now it is too late."

He knew then that it had been no self-pity. And he bent and kissed her—for the first time in many months.

She did not know that he had kissed her.

Only the grass orphan smiled in his sleep.

CHAPTER VII

FACING THE MUSIC

HEATHCOTE ST. JOHN woke up the next morning with the feeling that there was something seriously the matter with the State of Denmark. It took him ten minutes to discover that the complaint lay in himself and another ten minutes to readjust his ideas. He then rose, dressed mechanically with the usual careful attention to color schemes and went down to breakfast. Mrs. St. John had preceded him. Secretly he had hoped to miss her, but on the whole he was relieved to face the worst part of the situation at once and get it over. He noted that she looked pale and that there were dark rings under her eyes, also that she wore a morning gown of extreme severity. The latter feature impressed him deeply, being still in that stage of masculine ignorance where simplicity is considered synonymous with economy, and truth to tell Mrs. St. John was impressed herself. On the stage the starving heroine is invariably attired in the latest from Paquin, and Mrs. Heathcote who had never come in closer contact with the reality felt keenly the dramatic appropriateness of black cloth

and purple facings. It almost comforted her. It helped her to maintain an appearance of cheerfulness during such time as the obsequious Charles hovered round them, thereby counterbalancing her husband's blank dejection. But as the door closed even the consciousness of being in complete harmony with circumstance could not uphold her. She looked across the table appealingly, helplessly.

"Heathcote, I haven't closed my eyes the whole night."

St. John shook his head. The sensitiveness of the feminine constitution filled him with an awful sense of increased guilt. He had slept the profound sleep which quite inaccurately is supposed to accompany righteousness and a large banking account. He realized that he had fallen far below the height of the situation.

"I'm very sorry—I suppose I shouldn't have told you like that," he muttered apologetically.

"It doesn't matter. It had to be some time or other. Heathcote—" with a sudden petulance. "Is it really true?"

"I suppose so."

"Quite—quite ruined—or only a little bit like bankrupts?"

"I should say quite. At least—you know, I haven't anything except Uncle Jeremy's allowance and now that's gone. There's the house, of course, and the furniture, but I fancy we owe a good deal one way and another. Yes, I should say quite."

"Have you—thought what is going to happen?"

"To you—?"

"Yes—and Archibald?"

They looked away from each other. The episode of the preceeding evening recurred to them painfully. In the broad daylight it looked sentimental and out of keeping with their prescribed common sense attitude toward things in general and each other in particular.

"I suppose Archibald had better go with you," Heathcote said rather sullenly.

She gave a little unsteady laugh.

"Home? Do you know, that's really rather funny. I married you to get away from home and now I am to go back and take my son with me. What a lovely time father and mother will have bringing Archibald up! And how triumphant they will be! You know, they never did approve of you, Heathcote. Mother always maintained that a man who polished his nails was bound to come to a bad end."

Heathcote rose abruptly to his feet. He went over to the fireplace and rubbed his eye-glass and when he turned again it was with the air of a man who unexpectedly arrives at a decision.

"I think that settles it," he said. "I shall do something."

"Heathcote, for heaven's sake, don't get cryptic. Do what?"

"I shall take a post."

Mrs. St. John regarded his flushed resolute face for a moment in complete awestruck silence. Then she laughed—a low laugh of real gaiety and very genuine mockery.

"My poor Heathcote, how pathetic! What as? Office boy or a gentlemanly courier for old nervous ladies—"

"I am quite serious," Heathcote interrupted, unmoved. "I ought to point out to you that your low opinion of me is not shared by every one. There are people who believe in me."

"Really?" She leaned forward with her small determined chin resting in the palm of her hand. "Really, Heathcote? Who, for instance?"

It was unkind—deliberately unkind. What St. John was not in a position to realize was that Mrs. St. John had really spent a sleepless night and that beneath her callousness there was a childless helpless despair. He turned away from her.

"As you are not among the number we need not go into the matter," he said coldly. "All I need tell you is that I shall take a post of some sort or other—preferably in—eh—business. I know any amount of fellows who would be only too glad to help me. There's Smythe, for instance—"

"Heathcote, don't worry me with names. All I want to know is—what is going to happen?"

"Nothing."

"You mean—things will go on as they are?"

"I mean—I shall see what can be done."

"I suppose you haven't forgotten the dinner at the Ritz? Can that—go on?"

"Of course," said Mr. St. John airily.

Mrs. St. John got up and gathered together her morning's post.

"I never knew money was so easily earned," she said. From the door she glanced back at him, thoughtfully, curiously. "Heathcote, if ever you succeed in earning your living—"

"Well—"

"Then I shall be prepared for all sorts of miracles."

If there was a gentler note in her voice he certainly did not hear it. She went out closing the door sharply after her and he was left to his own reflections. Now that he had determined on his future course things did not look so black. But he was aggrieved if not altogether unpleasantly so. To be aggrieved, in fact, is to bear within one a profound sense of an injustice one day to be righted amid the plaudits and remorseful tears of one's relations. Heathcote saw himself grown stern and taciturn listening sadly to Mrs. St. John's outpourings of repentance. And in the background there was the pale earnest face of the poor little woman who had believed in him all through. Deeply moved, Heathcote retired to his library and for two hours busied himself with a rough estimate of debts and assets. He finally rang up a firm of auditors and commanded their immediate presence. Thereafter he prepared

to keep his daily appointment at the Carlton with the uplifted consciousness of having acted with firm and businesslike promptitude.

"If you please, sir, a gentleman to see Mrs. St. John."

Heathcote, who stood at the top of the stairs pondering the question as to whether or not he were justified in ordering out the car, answered inattentively.

"Mrs. Jt. John is in the boudoir. Who is it?"

"A Mr. Simpson, sir."

Heathcote instinctively glanced past Charles' face of fixed disgust to the hall below where a spectral figure draped in a frock coat belonging to another age loomed out of the shadows. For no particular reason he felt a wave of extreme annoyance flood over him.

"Oh, very well, tell Mrs. St. John."

He retreated. He disliked the musician fellow. He had not the slightest desire to meet him. It so happened that Heathcote chose the nursery as a place of refuge and that at the particular moment Archibald St. John, mounted on a white steed with symmetrically regular spots and two very alert ears, was engaged in a headlong flight from pursuing Indians. Heathcote's unexpected entrance caused a diversion in the nick of time. The Indians retreated, the fiery steed was reined in and the rider heaved a small sigh of relief.

"Hullo!" said Heathcote.

"Hullo!"

Both, as usual, were extremely embarrassed. Into Heathcote's "Hullo" there had been pressed any amount of grown-up jollity; into Archibald's, a polite how-do-you-do sort of resignation. He dismounted and advanced gravely with extended hand.

"Thank you very much," he said.

In his present state of mind thanks of any sort appeared to Heathcote ironical. But irony and the solemn upturned eyes were not to be reconciled. He took the proffered hand and wondered how on earth you were supposed to hold such a small ridiculous object.

"What do you want to thank me for, Archie?"

"For the horse."

"Oh, the horse," Heathcote glanced involuntarily with a sharp twinge of recollection at the now motionless animal. "Eh, yes, of course—I promised it you, didn't I?"

Archibald nodded.

"It came last night," he said.

"I see. I wonder who the dickens sent it you, old chap."

He glanced at the nurse. That lady, whose resemblance to Queen Elizabeth as portrayed on the dado may have accounted for Archibald's deep-rooted distaste for history, looked blank.

"He said it was you, sir."

"Really? No card, or anything, I suppose?"

"Not a line, sir."

Heathcote felt for his small fair mustache. He was beginning to wonder whether *he had* ordered the toy in an absent-minded moment, but his memory remaining unresponsive, he looked helplessly at Archibald. Archibald's gaze had never wavered in its grave attention.

"Looks as though I must have sent it, doesn't it?" said Heathcote basely.

"I 'spect you asked the goblin to bring it," Archibald corrected.

"The what—?"

"The goblin."

"The gob—?"

"Goblin is a gentleman fairy," explained Archibald solemnly.

This plunge into infantile mythology reduced Heathcote to panic. "I see—yes, of course. I expect that was it. Now I come to think of it I remember speaking to one of them about it—a queer-looking little chap—"

"Big," corrected Archibald.

"Big, of course."

"With yellow hair and a round red face—"

"The very man!" Heathcote declared.

Archibald's eyes filled with sudden alarm.

"Oh, I promised not to say—but you won't tell, will you?"

"Word of honor," Heathcote, groping blindly for escape from this labyrinth of deception, was prepared on his oath never to mention goblins again.

To cover over a disordered retreat he patted the new acquisition and playfully pulled the owner's curls. "Don't you ride him to death, old fellow. And be as good as you can. So long."

"So long!" Archibald returned solemnly.

As Heathcote withdrew he carried with him the picture of the baby face, unusually grave, painted against a turbulent background of English kings and queens (printed in four colors and warranted to wash) and he carried it with him all the way to the firm of Smythe & Smythe, Bootblack Manufacturers. Once or twice he found himself muttering "poor little chap" and conjuring up a gloomy future in which the little chap should be deprived of historical dadoes and patent beds and mechanical bears and in fact everything which he supposed made childhood bearable. It was quite pleasant to realize that thanks to his brilliant idea of "doing something" all these deprivations would be averted.

As Heathcote entered the private office of Audrey Smythe, Junior, the latter removed his heels from the office table and rose. He was a tall, weedy-looking young man, difficult to describe, since the one salient point in his outward personality was the faultless taste of his attire. As far as his face expressed anything it stood for a complete negation of all passions and a gentle somnolent good nature. He offered Heathcote a cordial hand.

"Glad to see you, St. John. Was just finishing my midday snooze and thinking about lunch. You

might come along and join or I shall go to sleep again over the soup."

"Thanks. I've come on business though."

"Business? Good lord! What is it? Do you want us to supply the St. John family with boot polish unto the third and fourth generations? Just say the word! It will be the first stroke of business I've done for the firm yet."

He seized a penholder and a sheet of account paper with a mock promptitude which did not for a moment lighten Heathcote's manner of weighty importance.

"My business is quite different," he said. "It concerns myself. As you are one of my best friends I shall be quite frank about it. Uncle Jeremy is ruined."

"You don't say so? What, Jeremy Harris? Well, I should never have thought that of him!"

"No nor should I." Heathcote agreed gloomily. "But one can't trust anybody nowadays. Of course, it's awfully rough on us. At first I didn't see quite what was going to happen. Naturally we want to stay where we are. The house isn't at all bad and Cecilia has her friends and all that and I'm sort of settled down, you know. I was really worried about it until I thought of something—I had an idea, in fact."

"That's good."

"And I came along to see what you thought of it."

"If you want me to lend you a fiver, dear fellow—"

"I don't," Heathcote interrupted firmly. "I disapprove of borrowing. I intend doing something."

"And that is—"

"Well, I suppose you'd call it earning my living."

Audrey Smythe ran a reflective hand round the corner of the office table.

"And what in shillings and pence do you mean by living?" he asked.

"Anything between five and six thousand." Heathcote considered a moment. "And even then we should have to move," he added regretfully.

"And the idea is, I suppose, that I should use my powerful influence to procure the job for you?"

"Well, I thought perhaps you might know of something."

Audrey Smythe sat up straight with an unusual semblance of energy.

"If I worked jolly hard I might get you a berth as clerk for one hundred and eighty pounds," he said.

"My dear Audrey—"

"And I'll tell you something more, dear fellow. If I wasn't the son of my father I'd have to work a good deal harder to get myself a job at all." He got up and stretched himself lazily. "I've got a lot more wisdom of that sort on tap if you'd like to hear it. For instance, what do you suppose all these dear fine hunting, golfing, polo-players at

the club would be doing if it weren't for their fathers and their Uncle Jeremys and their Aunt Marias? Blacking boots, dear fellow, and getting cursed at for doing it so badly. Couldn't black a pair of boots myself to save my life. Do you know what I get two thousand pounds and a suite of rooms at the ancestral mansion for? For coming here once a week, sitting in this chair for an hour in the morning and an hour in the afternoon and yawning myself to death. And do you know what difference there is between me and the rest of our glorious set including your honorable self? Nothing, except that I know I'm a waster and the rest think themselves the mainstay of the British Empire. And there you are!"

Heathcote rose slowly to his feet.

"You mean," he began, feeling carefully for his words. "You mean *I* am a waster?"

"Frankly—yes. Never struck you before?"

"No—I can't say it ever has—not quite that way at least."

"Ever struck anybody else, do you imagine?"

Heathcote fumbled for his eye-glass and polished it with more than usual solicitude.

"Well—'pon my word, I dare say it has, now you suggest it. Yes—I should say—decidedly." He fixed the glass firmly in a gloomy eye. "I suppose I haven't got a chance? That's what you mean?"

"I mean—I'm awfully sorry, dear fellow. If my respected parent went bankrupt to-morrow—

which heaven forbid—I should be in exactly the same fix and I should come to you and you would have to tell me exactly the same unpleasant truths. We've never been taught to work and we can't work. What we were made for no one knows—unless it was to show the world what beautiful things English money can produce. Take my advice, don't go to any more of our lot with your idea, Heathcote. Some of them won't be so friendly. Some of them will think you rather a rotter to have an uncle who goes bankrupt and will suggest your resigning your membership, and not one of them will be able to help you further than the fiver which you don't want. Keep your woes to yourself and hunt round for another Uncle Jeremy. It's the only hope any one of us has."

"Thanks." Heathcote picked up his hat and gazed miserably into the crown as though he expected to find some consolation in its depths. "It's very decent of you—but I don't think there are many more Jeremys in the family."

They shook hands.

"What about your wife and the boy?" Smythe asked.

"Don't know," said Heathcote.

At the bottom of the dark dingy stairs he came to a halt. For one thing he was feeling absurdly weak and dizzy and for another he did not know where to go. Above all else the thought of the house in Portland Square appalled him—the idea of

facing Mrs. St. John with the information that her opinion of him being correct, he could do nothing to fend off disaster, loomed hideous against the future. Bankrupt—not "a little bit bankrupt" as Cecilia had euphemistically expressed it—but quite —and not even a fund of self-respect or anybody else's to fall back upon.

And then suddenly a faint distant comfort dawned amid his thoughts. He put his hands in his pockets and discovered therein a few loose pieces of gold. For a moment longer he considered, wrestled with temptation and then recklessly strode out into the sunshine.

CHAPTER VIII

A SOUL ABOVE GROCERIES

THE gentleman with the curly-brimmed top hat and the cigar patted her good-naturedly on the shoulder.

"There, there, don't cry. You aren't cut out for this sort of thing. Try dressmaking or something soulful like that where it doesn't matter what you look like. Next, please!"

She stood staring up at him with a piteous blankness.

"You—you mean I've got to go?"

"Fired, my dear, fired—that's the word for it. I'm sorry but it can't be helped. You were spoiling the whole show; now then, don't block the gangway."

Just for a moment longer she wavered, looking about the stuffy little room as though it held some strange fascination for her. Then she gathered up the pitiful pile of shillings and crept out into the passage. It was very quiet and dark. Outside she could hear the snort and clatter of the taxis carry-

ing away the smarter members of that afternoon's performance and behind her the manager's voice rumbled on in alternative sorrow and anger, but where she stood there was a silence which—if silences can be said to have their own particular perfume—smelt strongly of cosmetics, bad scent and worse cigars.

Elizabeth Jones, otherwise "Lizzie," wept. It was a very noiseless proceeding, for long experience had taught her the art of crying without sobs. "Fired!" She had heard the word often enough for her to realize at the first sound its full significance. It did not stun her—it only opened out long vistas of future struggle, of weary pilgrimages from disappointment to disappointment, of landladies' faces growing longer and longer and meals growing proportionately shorter. And now—there was not only herself to be considered. There was the musician. He would have to be told. And it was so hard to tell him of failures. He had his own failures, and being of the artistic temperament he was impatient with other people. Sometimes she wished— She never allowed herself to finish the thought, and now that it trembled on the verge of formulation she hastily mopped her eyes and slipped out to the street. For the moment the light dazzled her. And as she stood there hesitating she could but remember that wonderful night when she had been suddenly snatched from the

squalor and meanness of it all right up into a boundless fairy luxury. She wondered if such a wonderful moment would ever come again and if he would ever remember—

And then some one touched her on her elbow, and she turned, and there he was!

He lifted his hat. In the broad daylight he looked, so she thought, both younger and sadder. And he was so well-dressed! Youth and sadness and a Bond Street tailor! No wonder her little aching suburban heart beat twice as fast.

"Oh!" she said under her breath. "Mr. St. John!"

He nodded, thereby acknowledging his own identity. He held a bunch of red roses in his hand and he gave them to her.

"I thought there was a matinée and that I should see you," he said. "I thought you liked flowers. You do, don't you?"

"I—I love them. Only—"

"That's all right then. May I walk a little with you?"

It came with a rush and his face was crimson. She looked up at him, her cheap beflowered hat a little crooked, shadowing a frightened amazement.

"Mr. St. John, it isn't right. If any one saw us —any of your grand friends—I'm only a chorus girl—not even that now—"

"Why, have you left?"

"I'm fired," she said chokingly.

"Fired?" Heathcote echoed. "Fired? That means—"

"The chuck—they don't want me any more."

"'Pon my word. Well, I don't see that that matters. It was a rotten show, anyhow, and you were too good for it. I told you so."

"Yes. But—"

"For goodness' sake—you're not crying—Miss Jones—"

They were standing in a quiet side street and as yet the stage doorway was empty so that there were no unkindly observers to criticize the unusual spectacle of an elegant young man offering a very plain and shabby girl the use of a silk handkerchief. Miss Jones continued to weep quietly. The softness of that handkerchief had broken the last link of Spartan self-restraint and she was enjoying the luxury of a real good cry. Heathcote, whose acquaintance with feminine tears was limited, looked on in helpless consternation.

"Miss Jones—please don't—I'm most awfully sorry—look here, if there's anything I can do—" He stopped short. "I wish to goodness I could do it," he finished lamely.

"Thank you—it can't be helped—you shouldn't mind about me—"

"But I do mind. Here, you mustn't cry any more. We'll talk it over. Let's go into the park and sit down. It's so beautiful out and it'll do you good. And then we'll see what can be done."

She lifted her red-rimmed eyes to his—she was painfully unattractive at that moment—but the humble confidence of that glance gave him a ridiculous pleasure, a feeling as though some one had laid a healing soothing hand on a recent wound. There rushed over him a wild impulse to promise her everything from the moon down to a leading lady's position at a West End theater but discretion prevailed. "You see, two heads are better than one," he explained with great originality.

She nodded and unprotestingly trotted at his side. She wore very high-heeled shoes—the cast-offs of some good-natured "star"—and their hurried click-clack was the only intimation that she was there at all. Heathcote also had become tongue-tied. His own unusual position—that of being "quite ruined" —lamed his initiative and dimmed his appreciation of the latent possibilities of his present adventure. Even when they entered the park and had chosen a couple of chairs beneath the trees Heathcote was still unconscious of doing anything unusual. The fact that one or two well-dressed loungers turned to stare at him wholly escaped his observation. He was miserable and ruined and this girl was miserable and ruined and it was a rotten world and nothing mattered. That was approximately his unformulated aspect of affairs. But Miss Elizabeth Jones was a woman and once upon a time she had lived in a semi-detached villa at Clapham, and even in her deepest woe she did not lose sight

of appearances. She touched him gently on the arm.

"Mr. St. John, we oughtn't to be here—somehow it isn't right—"

"Why not?"

"I don't quite know. But your swell friends—"

"I haven't got any swell friends," he interrupted bitterly. "Or at any rate I shan't have soon."

"And Mrs. St. John—I mean—" She crimsoned painfully. "She might not like it."

Heathcote laughed. It was quite a cynical laugh and did not suit the good-natured face of its owner in the least.

"Mrs. St. John won't mind," he said. And thereafter Miss Elizabeth Jones looked at him with the gentle sympathy which every woman, experienced and inexperienced, feels for somebody else's husband. "Tell me about it all," said Heathcote and knew that for some unaccountable reason he was already less despairing and very much less alone.

She shook her head. Her hands were primly folded on the stalks of the red roses and she gazed in front of her with wistful intensity.

"There isn't much to tell," she said. "They didn't want me any more. You see, I'm not pretty like the rest and they—they were just waiting for some one to take my place. It had to come. I was expecting it, of course, only not quite to-day."

Heathcote nodded with understanding for this very human attitude.

"Poor little girl!"

"I was silly to cry," she said. "Only one gets so tired of always looking for things—and finding them and losing them again. Sometimes one wonders what it's all for."

"Yes," said Heathcote. He was finding it all very philosophical and vaguely comforting. "But it'll all come right soon," he went on. "After all—when your musician makes a big splash! Who knows, perhaps you'll be rolling in your carriage with the best of them."

"Oh, no!" Her hands tightened. "Sometimes—" she began, and then broke off again and her head sank.

"Tell me!" said Heathcote gently.

"Sometimes I wish he wasn't a musician," she said with a little rush as though revealing a dreadful secret. "It's been in my mind for ever and ever so long but I haven't really dared think it out aloud till now. It seems wicked. He loves it so and he believes in himself and, of course, I know he's got a soul above groceries—and—and all that. He says so. But then I'm not clever—not a genius—and I sometimes think if he'd kept to the shop we should have got on faster—we might be married." Her eyes filled with a humble appeal. "You don't think it very wrong of me, do you?"

"Rather not!" Heathcote declared energetically. "If I were your musician I'd throw up the piano business on the spot. I'd sweep the streets to make

a home for you and get you out of this rotten life. 'Pon my word I would!"

"Would you—even if you loved beautiful things and knew you were much, much too good for—for ordinary jobs?"

"Yes," said Heathcote. He was not thinking of either her or her musician at that particular moment but he was staring at her with such a fierce intensity that the color ebbed and flowed in her pale cheeks. "If I could get an ordinary job I'd take it," he went on. "The man who can't or won't work for the people he loves is a—a waster." Upon which assertion he became very red—not with embarrassment but with surprise. He had not meant to say anything like that—he had not been conscious of thinking anything like that—but there were the two statements and he had made them. The girl's eyes shone.

"That was what I expected you to say," she said softly. "One knows you would bring any sacrifice. You are so strong—such a man!"

"Oh!" said Heathcote. "If you only knew—" He broke off. Somehow or other, in face of that blind trusting enthusiasm, it was rather difficult to instruct her in all the things she might have known. "I'm rather a rotter too, you know," he burst out heroically.

She shook her head smilingly.

"I know you're not, Mr. St. John. You'd say so, of course, because—because you've got such

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high ideals. But I've seen how good you are. Ever since last night when you told me how you went round trying to make sad ugly people happier I've thought of you as—as—"

"As what?" he asked.

"You won't laugh, Mr. St. John?"

"Word of honor."

"As a sort of—of fairy prince. I—I've called you that to myself ever since—you're not angry, Mr. St. John?"

"Good lord!" said Heathcote under his breath. To an outsider she might have seemed common at that moment and the whole thing rather suburbanly romantic. But Heathcote was not in a critical mood. He was feeling warmed through, comforted, uplifted.

"A fairy prince!" he echoed with a little awkward laugh. "'Pon my word, I've never thought in that light, you know, and I don't suppose anybody else has either, for that matter."

"All the sad ugly ones do," she said with simple conviction.

"Really?"

"I know," she said.

He was silent. There was quite an uncomfortable moisture on his eyes and he seized the eye-glass and polished it furiously.

"It's awfully decent of you to say so," he muttered. "You see, even fairy princes have their troubles and get pretty miserable. And it does them

good to get—eh—patted on the back sometimes, you know. I was feeling rather down and—"

"I knew," she interrupted, with the same gentle certainty.

"You knew—?"

"I knew last night. Somehow I felt that in the very midst of all your wealth and success and power you were miserable. You see"—she faltered a little—"people who are unhappy know when other people are unhappy quicker than most—that's why you picked me out and why I knew. You don't think it's intruding of me, do you? I know it's cheek to compare my silly little troubles with your big ones—"

"Don't!" Heathcote protested.

"They must seem silly to you," she repeated earnestly. "What is fifteen shillings a week to you—or the loss of it? You could make it again with the stroke of the pen. What's money to you?"

"As good as nothing at present," Heathcote admitted truthfully. And then suddenly he made a desperate plunge. "Supposing I told you that an uncle of mine had lost every penny in the world and—"

"Then I know you'd put him on his feet again," she interrupted radiantly.

"I see," said Heathcote. This new aspect of his position with regard to Uncle Jeremy held his attention for a moment and when he again reverted to the girl beside him all idea of stating the true case

had vanished. "Do you know, it's awfully comforting to have any one believe in me as you do?" he said gently.

"Is it? Doesn't every one believe in you?"

"Not quite every one, I'm afraid."

And then a startling thing happened. She stretched out her hand in the much-darned cotton glove and laid it on his arm.

"She will one day," she said. "She must."

"She—? You mean—"

"I think I understand," she went on dreamily. "I thought I understood last night—I guessed. You must have patience, Mr. St. John. It's all the money and wealth and luxury that blind her. If she were poor—as I am—she would know you better. She would realize better—"

"If you mean Cecilia—" Heathcote began helplessly.

"Cecilia? Is that her name? How pretty!"

"Yes, it is rather pretty, isn't it? And she's awfully pretty—far too good for me."

Miss Elizabeth Jones smiled a gentle smile of superior wisdom which was like warm sunshine to the man's aching pride.

"You've got a splendid lot of faith," he said huskily.

She shook her head.

"Oh, no, not in every one. I haven't got much in poor Harold. I love him awfully and all that, but somehow he isn't quite my ideal—not the strong

fighting man—like you are. I don't believe in his talent—and that hurts him and makes him angry and miserable. If only he had kept to the shop—or would go back to it—"

"Perhaps he will now. When he sees how badly things are going with you, he's sure to. Try him!"

She sighed faintly.

"I'll try—but he loves his art better than anything on earth."

"Then he's not worthy of you!" declared Heathcote hotly.

There was a moment's silence between them. Carriages and motors rumbled and snorted past them. Long streams of elegant promenaders brushed against them as they sat there in the blissful isolation of their thoughts. The picture of a well-dressed young man, arms folded in an attitude of Napoleonic concentration, gazing ardently at a girl whose ill-adjusted hat would have been dear at half-a-crown attracted considerable attention. Of this fact Heathcote knew nothing.

"You don't know how much you've helped me," he said. "But I've just dragged you out here and I can't help you a bit—I wish to goodness I could."

"You have helped me—" her voice trembled. "One always feels braver when one's been with brave people—and it helps, too, to—to feel one has a new friend in the world. You don't mind my saying that, do you? I know I'm a poor little nobody but friendship can't hurt any one, can it?"

"Rather not—I'm awfully glad—gladder than I can say—we're friends."

He held out his hand and the cotton-gloved one was laid in it with a fearless confidence.

"And one day it'll all come right for you," she said with tears in her pale eyes. "When she knows you—as I do."

"Thanks—I've got a lot to live up to, haven't I?"

They both laughed a little uncertainly and she rose.

"I must be going home now—"

"Mayn't I accompany you?"

"If—if you'd like to, Mr. St. John—you're very kind—"

And it was then for the first time Heathcote became conscious that somebody was staring at him. He raised his eyes and a moment later his hat. A lady in a brightly painted motor-car had bowed stiffly.

"One of my 'swell friends'!" Heathcote explained with a wry laugh. Then he hailed a passing taxi. "We're going to have a last good time together," he said. "I'm going to drive you home."

CHAPTER IX

ART AND WEAK TEA

ONE of the greatest mistakes possible is to write Paradise with a capital "P." There are as many paradises on our earth as there are hells, and each paradise has the double attraction of belonging to our neighbor. Mr. Harold Simpson's own particular hell was the attic of a Bloomsbury lodging-house and a hired piano, and the paradise into which he was abruptly ushered was Mrs. Heathcote St. John's boudoir. Mrs. St. John, of course, loathed the room. She had what might be described as a comfort-at-any-price taste, and the artistic valuables which Heathcote, with the help of an art dealer, had laboriously sought out for her, represented to her mind the last word in discomfort. But, left for a moment to his own devices, Mr. Simpson stood in the very center of the room and gazed about him with open mouth and eyes that literally swam in bliss. There was not a piece of china, not an ornament which was not to him a square meal—this being about the highest standard of values that he could think about without brain-dizziness. Sternly, pertinaciously, he had taught himself to love the

Beautiful. By sheer force of will he had, figuratively, lifted himself over the counter of the parental grocery store and had soared above biscuit-tins and soap-boxes into the world of Extreme Refinement where everything has capital letters, including the Beautiful. But it had not been a profitable business, for it is a law that the more you love Beauty the less likely you are to earn enough to be even on bowing terms with the meanest of her priestesses. And so Mr. Harold Simpson, who as a respectable grocer, might have had a Refined Home and a Bechstein piano, lived in a garret with a hired upright of unmentionable antiquity.

Mrs. St. John had a Bluthner in the drawing-room and an Ibach in her boudoir and could not play on either of them. But it gave Mr. Harold Simpson a positive thrill just to touch the beautifully polished lid which he dared not even raise. As he stood there, in the midst of a magic wealth which made everything possible and even probable his fancy soared to hitherto unattained heights. The Queen's Hall became the familiar scene of unprecedented triumphs; the attic vanished and in its place there appeared a fashionable flat, replete with every artistic luxury in which Lizzie, as his wife—There suddenly and unpleasantly the dream broke off. Somehow Lizzie did not fit into the future. He could not imagine her in these surroundings. She was such a drab plain little figure and she never real-

ly understood the Beautiful. He wondered— And then in the midst of his wonderings the door opened and Mrs. St. John entered.

Reassured by her husband's vague proposition of "doing something" she had discarded the black cloth with purple facings. She did not believe much in the "something" but—after the first shock—she believed still less in the reality of any catastrophe affecting herself. "Something"—either Heathcote's or somebody else's "something" was sure to turn up and in the meantime the newest, most complicated and uncomfortable of Parisian models had successfully revived her good spirits.

Mr. Harold Simpson bowed awkwardly. With the entry of this delicate wonderful peace of womanhood the picture had been completed.

"I'm so glad you've come!" she said cheerfully. "I was so afraid you'd forget or not think it worth while. Won't you sit down. Mr. — "

"Simpson," he filled in hastily.

"Of course. I'm so bad at names. Please forgive me."

"It is I who ought to apologize," he said carefully. "I feel that it is perhaps an intrusion—an impertinence to have made such quick use of your invitation, but it was Mrs. Deschesney who sent me. She advised me to come——" He hesitated. Mrs. Deschesney had said: "If you don't go at once, she won't remember your name in a week's

time." The prophecy having been more than fulfilled, he felt the wisdom of keeping it to himself. "You helped me over a very bad hour."

"Did I?" said Mrs. St. John. She looked at him with a pleased smile. He was balancing awkwardly on the edge of a gilt chair, and the daylight lent a greenish shimmer to his antiquated frock coat not favored by sartorial experts. But she liked his awkwardness and she liked his shabbiness. It was new to her. She liked the ardent gratitude and admiration in his rather wild-looking eyes and the feverish intensity of his movements. She thought them both symptoms of the artistic temperament, whereas in Mr. Harold Simpson's case—though he did not know it—a régime of weak tea and irregular meals had a good deal more to account for.

"Last night everything was at low ebb," he said in his earnest jerky way. "I had almost given up hope. You don't know how we musicians suffer from depression, Mrs. St. John."

"No, I suppose not." The "we musicians" vaguely gratified her, though she would be hard put to it to explain why. "We were all terribly thoughtless and careless last night," she added regretfully.

"Not you—you saved me. When I went into that conservatory I had almost made up my mind. And then you came, in the nick of time."

"Mr. Simpson!"

"I was tempted," he went on feverishly, "tempted to give up everything—to go back to the old state. I had—had an offer from a gentleman—the management of a business down Edgware way. It was a safe thing and I could have settled down and I knew Liz—my fiancée would have been glad. You see——" His brown eyes filled with bitterness. "She doesn't understand music and she doesn't believe in me."

"How hard for you!" exclaimed Cecilia, almost indignant.

"Everything pointed that way. It seemed to me that—that she might be right—that I was no good—that it was my duty to give it all up. It was like a message from Heaven when you came and told me that you had listened—and understood."

There was a moment's silence. Tears had crept into Mrs. St. John's eyes. She had never heard anything so touching and the detail that she had not heard a note of Mr. Simpson's efforts entirely escaped her memory. She saw herself in a woman's favorite role as soul-saver and benefactress and the idea lent dignity to her own sufferings.

"I am so glad, Mr. Simpson," she said with angelic gentleness. "It makes me very happy to have been able to help you. It even comforts me to think I have been of some use."

"You—of some use! You must bring happiness wherever you go!"

She sighed and smiled wistfully. She was beginning to realize how little she had hitherto been appreciated.

"We won't talk about that, Mr. Simpson. Won't you play something to me?"

"If you wish it—or am I detaining you? I thought I saw Mr. St. John on the stairs. He was going out and——"

"I was not going with him," she interrupted with the same resigned serenity. "I would call him in to listen, but my husband does not understand music—or art or things like that. It would only bore him."

Mr. Simpson nodded and their eyes met.

"It is strange how those we love misunderstand the best that is in us," he said sadly. He was thinking of Miss Elizabeth Jones' predilection for the grocery business and did not mean to be impertinent, and Mrs. St. John who had accepted him wholesale as her pet protégé was prepared to accept any familiarity as a proof of genius on one side, of her own large-heartedness on the other.

"Won't you play to me?" she persisted gently.

With genuine tenderness he raised the lid of the Ibach and sat down and for a full minute stared hungrily into space as though gathering together inspiration. Mrs. St. John raised her beautiful eyes to a "tiresome old master" and thought how splendid it would be if one could only mix up various personalities into one—say a little of Heathcote's

good looks with the musician's strenuousness, or a little of the musician's courage and enthusiasm with a little of Heathcote's extraordinary fastidiousness in the matter of neckties. (The musician's was a bright emerald, which, if hopeful, was a trifle unrestful, especially when taken in connection with the frock coat.) She had just constructed the perfect husband when Mr. Simpson's hand smote two powerful chords. Now Cecilia was everything but musical. She had been wont to declare—until she discovered that the joke had been made before—that she only recognized *God Save the King* by the respectful rising of the audience, and she had since accustomed herself to judging performers by the vibrations of their instruments. On this occasion not only the Ibach but the whole room vibrated. The musician, accustomed to antiquities which promptly collapsed under the slightest provocation, let himself go with great effect. It was a rhapsody of Liszt's and even the Dresden shepherdess on the mantel-shelf danced and the very air seemed convulsed with sound. Mrs. St. John herself was overwhelmed, transported, stupefied. When the final chord brought the shepherdess to a standstill she felt that she must have been listening to something phenomenal, epoch-making, for unmusical though she knew herself to be, she had been, with the rest of her surroundings, profoundly moved. Yet she was tactful enough not to speak, and when the musician turned he found her gazing with large beau-

tiful eyes at the "old master," and two tears rolling down her cheeks.

"You—you liked it?" he said huskily.

She nodded.

"I have never heard anything like it before," she said in the same unsteady undertone. "It was wonderful—almost terrible. And to think that you nearly gave it all up!"

"You—you think it worth while for me to—to go on?"

"I am sure."

"Thank you," he said simply. "I have such confidence in your judgment. If you had hesitated I would have given up and gone back to my old work. You see, I was getting afraid—distrustful of my own talent. We musicians are made like that." At that "we" his eyes shone with the old fiery enthusiasm. "If you believe in me I will go on."

"I believe in you. Do you know——" She hesitated, wavering perilously on the brink of truth. "Do you know what attracted me to you more even than your music? It was your pluck, your courage and your perseverance. I don't know anybody like you. It made me feel that you must be something great—a genius."

"And now that you have heard me play?"

"I am quite certain," she said triumphantly. "And one day I shall be proud to think that it was I who discovered you."

"And I shall be grateful to you my whole life long."

She gave him her hand and he bowed over it quite gallantly. But the really wonderful part of the scene was that they were both absolutely sincere.

"And now about the Queen's Hall," Mrs. St. John exclaimed cheerfully. "Having discovered you, I can't keep you to myself. I must exploit you. I must get you heard. What do you say to the twentieth?"

"Mrs. St. John!"

"Let me see—that will give us time to make all arrangements. Of course, we must have sandwich men all down Regent Street. I shall get Heathcote to see after all that. Then, there is the other advertising to be done—puffs, don't you call them? Heathcote can go to all the editors and make them promise columns and columns. Of course, all my friends will take tickets and all Mrs. Deschesney's. I shall run round to see her about it."

She was being intensely practical and in parts actually technical, the only detail which had escaped her being the small matter of Uncle Jeremy's financial decease. Mr. Harold Simpson gazed at her reverently.

"What shall I do to show my gratitude?" he murmured.

"Remember me when you are a great man!" she declared charmingly. "And stay to lunch. Will you? I shall be quite alone. We can talk things over."

Mr. Harold Simpson stayed to lunch. It is

doubtful which upset his balance the more completely—the unaccustomed wine and food or the breathless jump from obscurity and failure to the dizzy heights of prospective triumph. Between them they composed a letter to the management of the Queen's Hall. Mrs. St. John, on the theory that the more noise the better the music, wanted to engage the orchestra to accompany him, but there the musician hesitated and drew back. He had never played with an orchestra in his life. Perhaps at the bottom he felt a vague uneasiness about tempo and possibly conflicting opinions on the subject—at any rate he elected to divide the triumph with no one. By tea time they had drawn up a program. In this matter Mrs. St. John echoed obediently. The chief items were two rhapsodies of Liszt, a Beethoven sonata and a waltz of Chopin. There were other lighter fragments for the edification of the frivolous and unmusical—a little thing of Saint-Saëns and a transcription of *Carmen* by Mr. Harold Simpson himself.

"The great thing is to try to satisfy every taste," he confined naively, and Mrs. St. John agreed.

"We can't all be classical," she said.

Mr. Harold Simpson took his departure at five o'clock. He sailed rather than walked down the stairs and when he collided with Heathcote in the hall he mistook him for the butler and sailed on and out of the house with head erect and eyes

bright with the enthusiasm of "two square meals."

Heathcote stared after him. Then he went straight to his wife's boudoir. He had returned in a humbled conciliatory mood which the musician's unexpected reappearance had slightly ruffled, but his intentions were still of the very best. Now, for ordinary mortals the mountain heights of genius can become very exhausting, and Mrs. St. John, who had been living up to her protégé for six hours, had developed a headache. When Heathcote entered she was lying on the sofa with closed eyes which she did not trouble to open.

"If your master asks for me, say I'm busy," she said sleepily.

"Thanks," said Heathcote. "I'll take the message right away. Sorry to disturb you."

She looked up.

"Oh, it's you, Heathcote. I thought it was James. I didn't want to be bothered. I've a headache."

"I don't wonder."

"What do you mean?"

"If you've had that fellow with you all this time I should think you're in a state of collapse."

"What 'fellow' are you referring to, Heathcote?"

"That Simkins or whatever he calls himself."

Mrs. St. John sat up decidedly and smoothed her ruffled hair.

"His name is Simpson," she said, "and he is not a 'fellow.' He's a very clever musician and he's been playing to me."

"Since twelve o'clock this morning?"

"Don't be foolish, Heathcote. He stayed for lunch. Afterward we arranged his concert together."

"What concert?"

Cecilia glanced at her husband impatiently. He was being more than usually annoying and looking more than usually weary and inane. He had taken out a cigarette from a gold case and was considering it thoughtfully as though uncertain whether to light it or not.

"My concert," Cecilia said with a touch of defiance. "I'm going to launch him."

"I beg your pardon——"

"I said 'launch him.' He's a genius, but very poor, and he must have somebody to help him. All geniuses are like that, and it's an honor and a duty for people in our position to clear the way for them. I've just engaged the Queen's Hall and I want you to see after the advertising."

Heathcote did not answer for a moment. Evidently he decided against the cigarette for he tossed it into the grate.

"I suppose—it doesn't occur to you that I might—object to this acquaintanceship?" he said at last.

"Good gracious, Heathcote, why should you? interfere in your affairs?"

"No; sometimes I wish you did, Cecilia." This she left unfathomed, and after an instant he added, "I'm afraid you'll have to write off that Queen's Hall business."

"And pray—why?"

"You know perfectly well. I told you last night."

Mrs. St. John got up impatiently.

"You told me Uncle Jeremy was ruined and this morning you told me it didn't matter. You were going to do something."

"Yes, but——"

"Well?"

His well-shaped, carefully tended hand went out to the mantel-shelf. His head was bowed and she could not see his face, which had grown white and strained looking.

"It's just this—there is nothing for me to do. I can't do anything." He gave a wry little laugh. "I'm not a genius, it seems—and there's no one to help me. I'm a waster—and I'm not wanted."

He waited. Each sentence had been jerked out of him by sheer force. If she had known just how much it had cost—this miserable confession—she might have acted differently. But the first and only thing that she clearly understood was the humiliation—the disaster to herself.

"Does that mean—things are as bad as they can be?"

"About as bad as they can be," he echoed.

He was still waiting—he did not know quite for what—perhaps for the moment when she should see him as the little ballet-girl saw him, as something heroic, or perhaps just for the faintest signal of comfort and sympathy. Mrs. St. John went slowly toward the door.

"I suppose my jewels are my own?" she said.

"Of course——"

"Then I shall give my concert. I at least shall keep my promise."

That was her only reproach. She went up-stairs to her bedroom and cried her heart out over her own moderation and her own miseries. She cried so heartily that in the end she forgot what she was crying about, and then for the first time she remembered Heathcote—and Baby Archibald. A vague contrition stirred somewhere at the bottom of her self-pity. But when she went down to the nursery Baby Archibald was already in bed. She had forgotten to say good night to him, and after the fashion of babies he had cried himself into a feverish sleep of exhaustion. The nurse wouldn't hear of his being disturbed, and Cecilia had nothing to say in the matter. So she kissed him and crept away to her boudoir. But Heathcote had gone and when she tried his smoking-room door she found it locked. She did not knock. (Perhaps if she had, this little story would never have been written, which proves that every cloud has its silver lining.)

Instead, she went back to her bedroom, and following Baby Archibald's example, cried herself to sleep.

CHAPTER X

DEAR ADELAIDE

MRS. SMYTHE'S at home was in full swing—which is to say that her drawing-room was crowded and overflowing and extremely uncomfortable, and that the conversation had been successfully conducted into the channel of the latest scandal—three points indicating to Mrs. Smythe's mind complete social success. She herself was the center of attention and her story was listened to with a breathless interest by a closely-packed circle of her intimate acquaintances. Mrs. Smythe's "intimate acquaintances" were legion and decidedly heterogeneous in quality. She herself as the daughter of a rich stock-broker who dropped his "aitches" and the wife of a rich bootblack manufacturer and the stepmother of an Old Etonian with highly aristocratic friends of the same feather, hovered on the borderland of half a dozen social circles and belonged to none of them. Somehow with the best will in the world she had never been able to drop anchor—which was tragic because the only thing she lived for was society—especially the society

that she did not belong to. In truth, she was not quite rich enough. With the proceeds of a bright idea in the boot-polish business she might have obtained admission into the most select circles, but as it was, the select circles jibed at her florid accent and still more florid taste in hats. They were prepared to swallow anything connected with millions —even a direct descent from Abraham—but a merely well-to-do person had either to have her name in the *Peerage* or keep out altogether. So poor Mrs. Smythe had kept out and in despite had made her own circle. Almost anything within a certain radius was accepted, and as there are a great many Mrs. Smythes in the London world, all hunting for a harbor, she had been eminently successful. Here and there a newly-bought title personage, pleased to play Gulliver among the Lilliputs, graced her assemblies, but as a rule, as now, she was the center around which her Chorus gyrated.

"I assure you," she was saying in a tone of profound mystery, "I could hardly believe my eyes and ears. You must try to understand exactly how it was. I was standing in Greene and Greene's front room——"

"What sort of shop is Greene and Greene's?" put in a severe voice. "I never heard of it."

Mrs. Smythe glanced in the direction of the speaker.

"It's not a shop, my dear Adelaide," she explained with deference. "It's an auctioneer's, you

know. I had gone in about a sale of old china or something, and was just looking through one of the catalogues when I heard some one talking. You understand, the door was open—I could not help myself—it was most awkward."

"Of course," said a sympathetic parson's wife, evidently intending to assure the speaker of the understanding and approbation of Respectability. "Of course—most awkward."

"In fact, I could not help hearing," Mrs. Smythe went on regretfully. "You can imagine—the business had no sort of interest for me. It was all about the selling of a house and furniture in a great hurry—ready money or something of the sort being absolutely necessary. But when I heard Portman Square and the number—you know I nearly fainted. And five minutes later, who do you think should come out of the inner office—now who?"

"Who?" begged the Chorus, giving up the riddle, as was expected of them.

"Mr. St. John himself."

The Chorus looked at one another. With one exception their expressions signified an excited delight, covered over with a thin layer of shocked disbelief. The exception was the owner of the severe voice. She sat a little outside of the circle, very upright, very handsome in spite of the gray threads which mingled with the black hair, very determined-looking, with close-shut lips and keen sparkling eyes.

"Idiots!" she said under her breath, but loud enough for her neighbor to hear if she wanted to.

The parson's wife, as became a member of the cloth, recovered her speech first.

"You mean," she began gaspingly; "you mean, the St. Johns are—dear me, what's the horrid word? —bankrupt?"

"Worse than that—paupers," said Mrs. Smythe, whose ideas of bankruptcy included a house in town, a shooting-place for the season, and twopence in the pound. "I had it all from my maid. You know, it is so unpleasant. Her cousin—at least, she says he is her cousin—is footman at St. Johns', and of course she hears everything. And it seems that the St. Johns' uncle—you remember, Jeremy Harris, don't you, Adelaide, dear?"

"Adelaide, dear" drew herself up almost imperceptibly.

"I remember him very well," she said, and her bright eyes flashed with an aggressiveness which should have warned Mrs. Smythe that she had been guilty of a *faux pas,* but Mrs. Smythe and *faux pas* were so inseparable that she noticed nothing unusual in her guest's expression.

"Well, it seems that he has lost all his money, and, of course, the St. Johns being absolutely dependent on him, are ruined. They are trying to keep the matter quiet, but I know for certain that they are selling everything, and that Mrs. St. John is going home to her mother."

The parson's wife sighed.

"Pride comes before a fall," she said piously. "I always knew something would happen to poor Cecilia. Of her one can truly say 'Mammon was her God,' and——"

"And what will they do about the twenty-second?" broke in Mrs. Smythe, who cared very little for morals. "It's their dinner, you know. They can't put it off—at least——" The complications of the situation proved too much for her, and she relapsed into a moment's unusual silence, during which the Chorus looked at one another with increasing satisfaction. The dinner, they perceived clearly, must bring matters to a climax, when the truth, one way or another, would have to out. If they had any suspicions concerning the truth of Mrs. Smythe's statements it was because the lady—or, rather, her maid—had been known to make mistakes.

"At any rate that comes of leaning on a broken reed," began the parson's wife, intent on getting back to the moral of the case. "I always knew that Jeremy Harris would end badly. I told him so, I remember a few days before he left for some heathenish place. A scatter-brained, godless—"

"Rubbish!"

Undoubtedly the word had fallen, crisp and decided, but whence it came and whether it referred to the iniquitous Jeremy or his critic no one knew and no one ventured to inquire. At any rate it

successfully put a stop to the conversation. Mrs. Deschesney—otherwise "dear Adelaide"—had risen and stood looking straight in front of her with an alarming frankness.

"I'm going," she said. "Good-by." To cover over the unpleasantness of the situation, the Chorus rose in a flutter of amiability and uneasiness. Mrs. Smythe was foremost in the effusiveness of the farewell, for—"dear Adelaide" was rich and "dear Adelaide" also lived in Portland Square, and it is well to have as many friends as one can in that desirable neighborhood—if one can not live there one's self. Mrs. Smythe herself lived "just off Portland Square," but that, as every one knows, unfortunately, is a very different thing. And, besides, one can not put "just off Portland Square" on one's note-paper. So Mrs. Smythe called "dear Adelaide" her best friend, and "dear Adelaide" lived in blissful ignorance of the fact, and called Mrs. Smythe "a silly little thing" or "a fool," according to the state of her own temper and with absolute indifference as to who heard her.

"My dear, must you really go?" Mrs. Smythe said, holding her guest's hand between both her own. "I had so hoped you would be able to tell us something more about the St. Johns. You used to know Jeremy Harris, didn't you? And you live in the same neighborhood."

"But my maid has no cousins in the household," Mrs. Deschesney interrupted grimly. "That makes

a difference. I am sorry that I have nothing to tell you. Good-by."

She went—and the Chorus relapsed into a momentary silence, while Mrs. Smythe shook her head sadly and wisely.

"Poor dear Adelaide!" she said. "Bitter, you know, bitter!"

The Chorus signified their full understanding for the hidden depths of this terse comment by means of certain expressive contortions of the mouth and eyebrows, and the parson's wife folded her hands in the correct attitude of resignation.

"Of course, you know," Mrs. Smythe went on almost in a whisper, "there was something between these two. What it was no one knew, but Jeremy was of no family—no family whatever; and you know what dear Adelaide is—so exclusive. They say, though, that it nearly broke her heart."

The parson's wife lifted her eyes to the ceiling.

"Ah, pride of birth!" she sighed. "I always said—"

But what the parson's wife said or did not say is of little importance, and in the meantime the object of this interesting conversation had crossed the Rubicon, and having gained the sanctified regions of social greatness, arrived at a position directly confronting the much discussed number — Portland Square. There she paused and gazed up thoughtfully at the windows. There were as yet no very obvious signs of the debacle. An outsider

would not have noticed any change at all, but to her keen eyes the house had a troubled expression as though somehow its long-established dignity had been vulgarly disturbed. Mrs. Deschesney frowned, smiled satirically and went on. A few steps farther brought her to her own house, and without waiting to remove hat or coat, she went straight into her boudoir, switched on the light, rang the bell, and ordered the footman out of the room—all of which proceedings would have startled the latter personage very much if he had not been accustomed to the ways of his mistress, who was, as he acknowledged, "crusty and queer, but a real lady after all."

While waiting for a response to her heated summons, Adelaide Deschesney looked about her with a strange curiosity. It was almost as though she noted the beautiful details of the room for the first time, and there was an expression about her face, half bitter, half wistful, which at once accentuated the classic perfection of her features and laid stress upon her age. For it was an attractive expression, but the expression of a woman who looks back rather than forward.

She was so absorbed in her own thoughts that the gray-haired servant who entered the room a few minutes later only succeeded in drawing her attention after a long series of discreet coughs. Adelaide Deschesney turned abruptly.

"Jane," she said gravely, "you are an old and trusted friend of my family. I have great con-

fidence in your judgment. I wish you to give me your close attention."

"Yes, Miss Adelaide."

"I want you in the first place, to tell me exactly what you think is the matter with this house."

The old woman hesitated, evidently at a loss; her gnarled toil-worn fingers fidgeted with the corners of an immaculate apron.

"Miss Adelaide, I don't really know—"

"Yes, you do—you know perfectly well. You don't need to tell me that the bathroom wants re-papering or that there is a crack in the drawing-room ceiling. I am quite aware of it and I am not alluding to that sort of thing. I am alluding to something quite different. You wouldn't call this a happy house, Jane, now would you?"

"No, Miss Adelaide."

"Well, what would you call it?"

"I— I'd call it a lonely house."

Miss Adelaide nodded to herself.

"Yes," she said. "That's what I should call it, too—a lonely house." She was silent a moment and then she turned with a faint smile. "And how would you describe me, Jane? You needn't mind being frank. Anybody who calls me 'Miss Adelaide' can call me anything."

"A bit lonesome, too, Miss Adelaide—and—and a bit soured, if you'll excuse my saying so."

"Oh, I'll excuse you with pleasure. A bit soured? I dare say you are right though I do not care very

much for your methods of description. 'Soured' suggests something that has been kept too long on the shelf. Do you thing I'm past saving, Jane?"

"Oh, no, Miss Adelaide—if I might be so bold as to say so—if the right man—"

"My dear Jane, don't be so horribly bourgeois. Your mind runs on marriage and at our time of life we don't think about that sort of thing—it's not nice. Still, you think there's some hope for me. Well, so do I. Now tell me, Jane, how much do you think a nice well-brought-up baby costs?"

Jane stared solemnly. She was hardened to most of her mistress' vagaries and had made it a point of honor never to appear too utterly dumfounded.

"If you please, Miss Adelaide, people don't sell babies."

"Why not?"

A quite youthful flush spread over the old wrinkled face.

"People don't sell babies," she repeated stubbornly. "Their mothers wouldn't. I know they wouldn't."

"Well, if you know it there's nothing more to be said. But you're getting old-fashioned, Jane. People sell anything for money."

"Not babies, Miss Adelaide."

"Yes, even babies." She laughed good-naturedly. "Now, Jane, don't stare and don't get stubborn. Think a moment; isn't there an unfurnished room somewhere at the top of the house?"

"Yes, and it's a real shame—"

"A nice room, Jane?"

"As nice as any in the whole house, Miss Adelaide."

"Suitable for a nursery?"

"For a—a—"

"A nursery, I said. Jane, I've asked you not to gape. We're going to have a child."

The old servant looked round helplessly and her eyes rested on the door with a decided nervousness.

"A—a—child—we?" she gasped incoherently. "If you please, Miss Adelaide—I mean—ma'am—"

"Now, Jane, don't stammer and don't say you don't understand. I never expected you to. Just try and grasp the fact that this time next week you will have a small boy of five to look after and you'll feel clearer in your head."

Either Jane could not grasp the fact or the grasping process did not have the prescribed effect. At any rate, her expression of bewildered horror deepened.

"Please—a little boy," she jerked out. "I don't know anything about little boys—"

"Nor do I, Jane. But we're going to learn. I shall see about everything to-morrow—everything must be in perfect order—for you see, the little boy is to be my son." She seemed to take a grim pleasure in her maid's increasing discomfort, but she cut short all interrogations with a wave of the hand.

"Jane, you're going to ask silly questions—don't. I've said all I want to say. You can go."

The old servant turned tail and fled.

Adelaide Deschesney caught a glimpse of her own face in the glass.

"My son!" she said aloud, and smiled.

CHAPTER XI

A NOSE OUT OF JOINT

IT must be confessed that Miss Elizabeth Jones was a very bourgeois person. In the first place she had a profound respect for money and a holy horror of debt. These two sentiments had made her unpopular at the Lincoln Theater of Varieties and had divided her by an unbridgable gulf from the artistic and consequently reckless temperament which whirled and gyrated before the footlights to the latest rag-time. She had been voted "timid" and "stupid," and "timid and stupid" she seemed likely to remain to the bitter end. In her position every member of the Lincoln's Beautiful Bevy would have snapped her fingers, bullied her landlady, run up bills and waited with Micawberian philosophy for "something to turn up." Miss Elizabeth Jones counted her pence and then crept down the gloomy stairs of the boarding-house to the mysterious region where the "widow of an Army Captain (refined) and owner of a commodious and comfortable house (very mod.)" kept watch over the larders.

Mrs. Belbury received her with Manner III—that is to say with a non-committal affability

touched with condescension. The little ballet-girl, euphemistically described as "on the stage," occupied an otherwise unletable garret which made her desirable, but she took no part in the "liberal table," which made her an object of dark suspicion. Mrs. Belbury, surrounded in red plush furniture and relics of the dear departed, rose with a rustle of stiff satin as Miss Jones entered and unbent two degrees from her military dignity.

"Is there anything I can do for you, Miss Jones?"

This was her stock greeting. Newcomers were sometimes deceived by it into supposing that some of their grievances were going to receive redress but old hands knew better. Mrs. Belbury, it appeared, was in the regrettable position of never being able to do anything for anybody.

"Might I speak to you a moment, please?"

"Certainly." The door was closed, Mrs. Belbury, who knew the symptoms, became more formal. "I hope you have no complaint to make?"

"Oh, no. It's not that—it's quite different. I've come to tell you—I—I've got to go."

"Dear me, aren't you comfortable? I'm sure, Miss Jones, I've done everything in my power—"

"Oh, yes, you have—I know you have. I've been so happy here but I can't stay. I've lost my job."

She hung her head to hide the tears that had crept into her pale eyes. Extraordinary to relate

she *had* been happy. In the barely furnished garret she had dreamed dreams—funny little dreams in which the musician and a neat "family grocery" with a back parlor played a leading part. It was there, after that one wonderful night, that she had sat and gazed at the rich cluster of roses and dreamed quite different dreams, in which, funnily enough, the musician and the grocery had no part at all. Perhaps the perfume of the roses had intoxicated her. The perfume still lingered. An uncontrollable tear threw itself overboard and splashed ostentatiously down a pale cheek.

"Dear me!" said Mrs. Belbury. It wasn't usual for her guests to cry on departure and she was almost touched. "Perhaps you'll get taken on somewhere else," she suggested hopefully.

Miss Jones shook her head.

"I'm no good," she said humbly. "I can't dance —really—and I am so plain. And then I haven't got the right temperament, you know. I ought to be a dressmaker's assistant or something like that where it doesn't matter how ugly one is—" She stopped, too sad to go on, and Mrs. Belbury pondered.

"Precious few people want a dressmaker's assistant," she said in a tone that had lost something of its ultrarefinement. "And what are you going to do until you get a job?"

"I don't know."

"You can't stay here. I'm a poor woman, Miss Jones, and charity begins at home. I can't help any one who isn't paying—or earning their board and lodging."

Miss Jones looked up. A faint, half incredulous hope glimmered behind the tears.

"Oh, if I could only earn it!" she said breathlessly.

Mrs. Belbury pondered again. Her small alert eyes measured the possibilities of the situation with businesslike rapidity.

"It might be managed," she said. "Susan gave notice this morning and her manner was so outrageous that I should be glad to get rid of her at once. If you like to take her place you can stay." There was no answer for a minute. Considering that the glad prospect of replacing the downtrodden, badgered Susan might have taken away the prospective substitute's breath, she added soothingly: "Of course, you understand, there will be no question of wages. You are inexperienced and I'm sure to have a lot of trouble with you. On the other hand, your position will be different. I shall call you my lady-help."

Miss Jones raised her eyes bravely. Perhaps the "lady-help" had just turned the scales. It made the drop from the position of the eighteenth girl in the Beautiful Bevy to maid-of-all-work a little less violent.

"I'll do my very, very best," she said tremulously, but earnestly. "I'll begin now—if you tell me just what I'm to do."

"You can begin now by dusting out Mr. Samuels' sitting-room." Mrs. Belbury answered with a promptitude which suggested no lack of ideas on the subject. "And then you can do the stairs and the bedrooms and, of course, answer the door. And afterward cook will want you to wash up. You'll find one of Susan's old aprons in the pantry."

"Yes," said Miss Jones meekly.

"And let me see—what's your name—your first name?"

"Elizabeth."

"Well, I think we'll make that into Lizzie. And don't forget to call me madame. It's a thing I always insist on as belonging to a genteel establishment. You can go, Lizzie."

"Thank you—Mrs. Bel—madame!"

"There's the front door-bell. Here's an apron. You can go at once."

Lizzie flew. The whole thing had been settled so rapidly that it was only by the time she had reached the murky little hall that she realized her own metamorphosis. Then as she opened the door she drew back with a little gasp. It was the musician. As he saw her the smile on his face vanished. He looked her up and down with a troubled amazement and last of all his eyes rested on the insignia of her new post—the apron.

"Elizabeth!" he said gravely.

She said nothing but let him pass and then closed the door again. But she did not invite him into the parlor. She was breathing quickly—a little as the result of her rapid transit up the stairs—a little with a vague fear. She had rarely seen the musician so resplendent. Only once before had he donned the frock coat, on the occasion of their engagement when he had taken her to a Bach concert—and she knew that something wonderful had happened.

"I—I did not know you were coming," she said uncertainly. "You gave me quite a start."

"I meant to," he said, but somehow his tone did not suggest much facetiousness. "I say, do you often—open the door like that?" he asked abruptly.

She shook her head. She felt that he was aggrieved—hurt, disappointed. And suddenly she realized how hard it was going to be—she leaned against the wall. "Aren't you going to let me in?" he said.

"I'm sorry, Harold—I can't—I'm busy—"

"Busy—now? A rehearsal?"

"No, dear. There aren't going to be any more rehearsals." She tried to put a little more cheerful courage in her voice. "You see, I'm—fired."

"Fired!" He did not like the word, but one can not forget the vernacular of one's childhood and he knew her meaning. "Why?"

She winced. It hurt somehow, even more than she expected. There was no sympathy in his man-

ner and his brows were puckered with an almost fretful annoyance.

"You see, I didn't suit in with the rest," she explained patiently. "I'm not graceful or pretty and so they gave me the chuck."

"And now—?"

"I'm taking Susan's place."

"Elizabeth!"

"A lady-help, Mrs. Belbury calls it," she explained.

He recovered slowly. But she felt that she had dealt him a blow which was almost physical in its result.

"How awful!" he said under his breath.

"Harold—" She laid an appealing hand on his arm. "You mustn't mind. I don't. I'm quite glad to do it."

"You!" he interrupted passionately. "You! But don't you think—have you no thought at all for what *I* feel?"

"But it can't be helped, dear. I knew you would be upset. But I must do something. I haven't a home—"

"Is that a reproach?" he flashed out.

"Oh, no, dear, you know it isn't. I only wanted to explain."

"It's terrible!" he interrupted again. "Terrible! If you could only have kept your place a little longer!"

"What difference does that make? You hated my dancing—"

"I know—I know. But still it was something—it might have led to something. In a way it was a profession—honorable—"

"Isn't all work honorable?"

He threw back his head scornfully.

"Don't be bourgeois, Lizzie. Work like that may be honorable but it's ugly, inartistic—unesthetic. To think—my future wife sweeping floors for these common people—"

"They're not common—not more common than you or I, Harold."

"Elizabeth!" They were going from bad to worse. As she saw his blank white face she began to laugh unsteadily.

"Why, Harold, we are common—not very common, but still other people might think so. Father was only a clerk and your father kept a grocery—"

He cut her short with an imperative wave of the hand.

"I don't think you realize quite with whom you have to deal," he said stiffly. "Art ennobles every one. That is something other people understand better. I came here with great news for you but I fear you will hardly appreciate it—"

"Harold, you've taken that position at the tea-shop—"

"I have not." His eyes flashed. "But I have found some one who believes in me—who understands and realizes my message to the world. On the twentieth I am to give a concert at the Queen's Hall."

He waited. That sentence had been prepared and rehearsed in a dozen different tones—its effect had never been doubted. Yet she looked at him gravely, without enthusiasm, her pale cheeks a little paler—almost as though with disappointment.

"I'm glad, Harold—very glad," she said dully.

"If it's a success, I shall give more concerts all over the country. In a year or two I dare say I shall be able to—" He did not finish his sentence. The word stuck in his throat. He looked at her—at the apron, at the plain homely face with the pale tired eyes—and then at a mental picture of an Ibach piano in a blue and gold drawing-room, of himself in the midst of earth's great ones expounding the music of the future. "I don't believe you believe in me!" he burst out. "I believe you'd rather I'd gone into the shop."

"No, no. Only it seems—surer, doesn't it, Harold?"

"Surer! You have no faith."

It was strange—but it was quite true. She hadn't. She looked at him and somehow even the frock coat did not impress her as it had done once. She could not help noticing how funnily it sat his sloping shoulders, and how his trousers bagged at the knees.

"I'm sorry, Harold," she said gently. "You see, I'm—not musical—not artistic. I don't understand perhaps."

"What *do* you understand?"

"I understand people who work for those they love," she said dreamily.

He stared at her. He was thinking of all poor Wagner suffered by his first matrimonial mistake and felt already a bitter sense of injury.

"I'm afraid we are at cross-purposes, Elizabeth," he said very coldly indeed.

"I'm afraid so, Harold. And I—I don't want to hamper you. I wish you the very best of everything—fame and happiness—and everything—but I don't think I'm fit to be a big man's wife—"

"Lizzie, Lizzie, have you done Mr. Samuels' room yet? Who are you chattering to?"

The imperative voice from the lower regions caused them both to start violently. He looked at the cheap little gold ring which she had slipped into his hand.

"Do you mean it?" He was acting like a gentleman—giving her a last chance. No future biographer should say that he left his humble friend in the hour of his triumph.

"I think it better so, Harold."

"Very well. Good-by."

He went out, slamming the door after him. Miss Elizabeth Jones wiped the blinding tears from her eyes.

"Lizzie, are you going or are you not? It's past ten—"

"I'm just going, madame—just going."

So it came about that Miss Elizabeth Jones, late of the Lincoln's Beautiful Bevy, tapped nervously at Mr. Samuels' front sitting-room and upon receiving a gruff permission crept in, armed with an aged broom and several ragged dusters.

Mr. Samuels unwrapped himself slowly from the mighty folds of a *Times* supplement. He was the only lodger who kept the *Times*—and it was still in its three-penny days—and the only lodger who, in the memory of Mrs. Belbury's refined boarding, had been able to afford the luxury of a sitting-room. For him alone, therefore, was reserved the sweetness of Mrs. Belbury's Manner I, and the best slice of the Sunday joint. The other lodgers eyed him with hungry suspicion. They acknowledged among themselves that they did not like the looks of him. He was short, thick-set and wore check suits of somewhat obvious pattern. The more astute of his critics had discovered distinct traces of criminality in his square-jawed, sunburned features. Pointed ears, it was remarked, invariably pointed to a dishonest hankering after one's neighbor's property and as none of the lodgers had any property they came to the conclusion that Mr. Samuels was "lying low" after some peculiar nefarious campaign elsewhere. Mr. Samuels, lapped in the joys of the first-class manner, pursued his ways—evil or otherwise—in blissful good-natured ignorance of the cloud of distrust. Now, as he recognized his visitor, he arose with an ungainly politeness to his feet.

"Good morning, Miss Jones."

"Good morning, sir."

She blushed hotly. It is not easy, after one has been "something" on the stage to have to acknowledge to a fellow lodger that one has sunk to the level of a much abused Susan. She avoided his interrogatory stare and began methodically to prepare for the business before her.

"Hello, what *are* you up to, young lady?"

"I'm not a young lady," she said desperately. "I've come to do your room, sir."

"You've what—?"

"Come to do your room, sir."

Mr. Samuels ruffled his wispy hair into a state of luxuriant disorder.

"I wonder which of us two is suffering from delusions?" he mused pleasantly.

"It's not me, sir," she returned ungrammatically, but with a gentle firmness. "If you wouldn't mind moving, sir, I'll shake the mat for you."

"Put that down!" She put it down in sheer surprise at the unfeigned alarm in his voice. "That mat hasn't been shaken for years," he added severely, "and I don't intend that it shall be shaken at this stage of the proceedings. Let sleeping dogs lie—that's my motto. That's right. Now tell me what you're doing in that get-up."

"Trying to dust your room, sir."

"Hump. 'Trying' is good. If you intend following Susan's example of shifting the dust from the

mantelpiece on to my head I can only beg of you to desist. But that doesn't explain matters."

"I'm—I'm Mrs. Belbury's—help, sir." She left out the "lady." Somehow, though he wore checks of loud pattern, she felt that he would not be easily impressed by subtleties of that sort. "I'm—I'm instead of Susan," she faltered. Very gently, but firmly, he disarmed her, tossed the dusters into a far corner and propped the broom against the wall. Then he offered her his best chair with a gallantry that could not be denied.

"Mr. Samuels—sir—I can't. You don't understand—"

"But I want to. Do you mean to tell me you are delighting the world by night and sweeping away its cobwebs by day?"

"Please, sir, I'm not delighting any one. I never did—and now—I'm just instead of Susan."

"Not dancing any more?"

She shook her head and stared down at the suspected mat to hide the tears and the red eyelids.

"Poor little girl!"

It was remarkable what gentleness could be expressed by such a gruff voice. She looked up again in blank surprise.

"It's very kind of you, sir."

"Bosh! A stone would sympathize with any one taking Susan's place. What's that musician fellow of yours doing—why doesn't he come along and

look after you? You told me he had the offer of a good post?"

"He—refused it."

"Refused it? Bless my soul—why?"

"He's found some great lady who believes in him, sir. And he's going to give a concert at the Queen's Hall—"

"Well, that's not bad—if he brings it off." She made no answer and his small keen eyes twinkled at her. "You don't think he will, eh?"

"I don't know, sir. I hope so—he's so keen—I think it would break his heart. But—but—it won't change things for me. It's all over."

"My dear girl—why on earth—"

"I'm not good enough for him if he wins through," she said dully. "I'm not clever enough—and—and I couldn't keep pace with his fine friends. And if he fails—" She faltered an instant—"Then he's not good enough for me."

"Miss Jones—what's this—swollen-head?" Mr. Samuels shook a stumpy admonishing finger. "The other night Mr. Simpson was the last thing in all the virtues and now he's not good enough. What's happened in between times, eh?"

"Nothing much, sir—only somehow—I can't respect him like I did. I don't know why—I can't help seeing how—how young he sometimes is—and how selfish. If he really loved me he would have given things up and worked—like a man."

"Bless me!" said Mr. Samuels energetically. "You've been falling in love!"

"No, sir—"

"Yes, you have. I recognize the symptoms. You've got an ideal and poor Mr. Simpson's nose is out of joint. Now, my dear girl, I'm old enough to be your father. Tell me the whole thing."

She told him. She wondered afterward how she came to do it, but his manner was irresistible. She told him about the roses and the motor-car and the unhappy fairy prince whose goodness was only equaled by his sorrows; she told him of their friendship and once Heathcote's name slipped out. She flushed crimson.

"I oughtn't to have told!" she said miserably.

Mr. Samuels leaned back in his chair. His bulldog face was puckered with indecipherable emotions.

"I'm as safe as houses," he comforted her. "And perhaps I can help. Let me see—here's a brave young millionaire, slaving the livelong day for greater accumulations of bawbees and spending his nights in unthanked well-doing. Misunderstood and not appreciated, of course. An heroic picture. And here's Mr. Harold Simpson, also misunderstood and not appreciated but not heroic. My dear"— he shook his bullet head—"do you realize none of us is understood and appreciated. I'm not. My whole life has been spoiled by lack of appreciation."

"Yes, sir," said Lizzie confusedly.

"So I have the greatest sympathy with my fellow sufferers. Do you know what I am?"

She started in alarm.

"No, sir."

"I'm a goblin—so I have been told, at least, by a reliable authority. I dare say you don't know what a goblin is—I didn't myself until a few days ago. But it appears that the chief characteristic of the species is a surprising ability to put everybody else's affairs in order except their own. I intend taking yours in hand, Miss Jones. But there's one thing I must know; is Mr. Simpson's nose wholly, irretrievably out of joint?"

Miss Jones stared. What with the dark insinuations of the other lodgers and Mr. Samuels' unusual conversation she was beginning to feel thoroughly alarmed.

"I—I don't know, sir."

"I mean—if Mr. Simpson were a little finer and Mr. St. John a little less fine than you imagine—would Mr. Simpson have a chance, do you think?"

The every ready tears gathered rapidly.

"He—he—doesn't want me—he doesn't need me, sir, I'm not good enough for him."

"Supposing he changed his mind?"

"He won't—"

"One never knows!" said Mr. Samuels darkly.

At that moment Mrs. Belbury's admonitory voice sounded down the passage. Lizzie gathered up the broom and dusters.

"And I've never dusted your room, sir!" she exclaimed, wiping away the tears instead.

"And don't you ever dare try it again!" Mr. Samuels retorted. "There's no use in exciting the microbes to militancy and I won't have it. And remember"—he added, as Miss Elizabeth Jones slipped into the passage—"all is not gold that glitters!"

Miss Jones fled; Mr. Samuels wrapped himself again in the *Times* supplement, which, it seemed, was in an unusually jocular mood, for Mr. Samuels chuckled hugely.

CHAPTER XII

BUYING A BABY

"IF you please, Mr. St. John, I should be so glad to run over the things in the drawing-room. My catalogue says Sèvres and Dresden china ornaments. If it wouldn't be troubling you—"

The square-built, decidedly commonplace-looking man with the untidy note-book left his sentence unfinished and tiptoed gingerly into the room which had been thrown open for him. Mr. St. John followed him passively and then cursed under his breath. His wife was standing at the far end of the room, her head bowed; but as the two men entered she drew herself unright and faced them, a miserable little figure with flushed face and eyes bright with tears and resentment.

"You might have knocked, Heathcote!" she began stormily. "You know—"

"My dear, this is Mr.—Mr. Samuels, from Greene and Greene's you know," St. John broke in hastily. "You know—about the china."

She made no answer, but stood watching the intruder with contracted eyebrows and furious eyes. On his round of the luxurious room he sniffed, and

while contemplating her favorite Dresden shepherdess he even blew his nose loudly—a piece of disrespect which caused Mrs. St. John to bite her lip in a paroxysm of impotent rage. Her husband watched her with the helplessness of despair. He was realizing with an unusual keenness—for he was not given to realizing at all—what an immense gulf of feeling if not of time separated them both from that first night of catastrophe when he had found her crying by Baby Archibald's bedside. The whole thing seemed so far-off, so utterly improbable that he was beginning to wonder whether it had not been a dream. At any rate it was all gone. The first enthusiasm of grief and self-reproach was over, the wings of a passing remorse hung limp in the gray dank atmosphere of reality, and she at least was facing matters very much as a woman of her type would face them, with a petulant childish revolt. As for St. John, in spite of the fact that he himself was in "a devil of a mess," as he would have described his own state, he felt something that was like pity for the pretty unhappy woman-child who stood frowning miserably at the wreck of her favorite toys. If it had not been for the memory of the musician and the threatening concert he would have been very sorry indeed. But that rankled. He was not quite clear why it rankled for hitherto his wife's missions and commissions had not interested him particularly, but in this case the sense of injury was profound. "It was a deuced shame," he reflected

in his choice vernacular. "A deuced shame." He got no further than that piece of wisdom, partly because he hated tracking down the "whys" and "wherefores," and partly because Mr. Samuels, of Greene and Greene's, had finished his inventory.

"And now the dining-room, if you wouldn't mind," he said with a fat sigh of content. "Sorry to have troubled you, ma'am. Good afternoon!"

Mrs. St. John made no response, but her husband making movement as though to accompany the unwelcome guest, she caught his arm in a grip of nervous strength and held him back. He saw that her face was scarlet and that her nostrils quivered with an almost hysterical emotion, and with an instinctive dread of publicity he closed the door.

"Cecilia—" he began faintly protesting.

"Don't Heathcote—when are the things to be sold—I mean, when must they—we go?"

"On the twentieth, Greene and Greene said—"

"Heathcote—it isn't possible. There is our dinner—"

"My dear, we shall have to—what you call it?—*un*vite those people—put them off—you know. It sounds ridiculous—but we haven't the money to pay for as much as the first course."

"Heathcote—there are my jewels—"

"Cecilia, you seem to think your jewels are going to do everything. I told you that they belonged to you—and so they do—those that I gave you. But those that Jeremy sent have got to go to pay

what are virtually Jeremy's debts. It's a fine distinction but there is a distinction. You have chosen to back up—that musician rather than me, and you've got to abide by your choice."

"Heathcote, but everything is ordered. We can't counter-order all the things without an explanation!"

"We shall just have to explain," her husband observed with the placidity of despair.

She looked up into his face, open-mouthed.

"Explain—that we are paupers—to those people? You must be mad! I can't. Oh, Heathcote!" She shook his arm in a storm of uncontrolled revolt. "I can't bear it! I simply can't bear it! I can't face things—I can't go back to the old stuffy life at home—it's too much to ask of me. Can't you do something—can't you make money—oh, Heathcote, do anything!"

He patted her very much as he would have patted Baby Archibald's head, with about the same degree of understanding and the same desire to express sympathy.

"Cecilia, my dear girl, I would do anything—give up anything. Only—dash it all, there's nothing of mine to give up and as for doing anything—never did anything in my life."

"No, that's true." She smiled faintly and sarcastically. "Heathcote," she went on, with a sudden movement that was almost defiant, "there are

your stables—your race horses—you used to say they were worth a small fortune."

"They're gone," he answered, with averted face. "Put up for auction yesterday." He coughed as though to cover up an uncomfortable hoarseness, and a new expression came into his wife's face. She drew back a little and regarded him with a vague wonder and comprehension.

"Your horses!" she repeated dully. "Your favorites——"

"If you please, ma'am, Mrs. Deschesney to see you!"

The footman stood on the threshold, an image of offended and injured dignity. His manners were as gentlemanly as ever, but every line in his face expressed the consciousness that disgrace hovered in the air, and that, having the misfortune to have been one of the family, it reflected itself on him.

Mrs. St. John made a movement of protest—it came too late. Adelaide Deschesney brushed the footman to one side and closed the door firmly and decidedly in his face, once and for all proving to that august person that she was no lady and never would be one.

"I knew you wouldn't see me," she observed with businesslike calm, "so I came in before you said so. I hope you won't mind more than you can help."

Mrs. St. John did not answer—the expression of

wonder was still in her wide-open eyes—and her husband came hastily to the rescue.

"You know—we are always pleased to see you," he said. "Sit down by the fire—we shall have tea in a moment." He rang the bell energetically. "Tea!" he ordered, as the footman's red and insulted face once more appeared in the doorway. "Tea at once!"

The footman vanished. Adelaide Deschesney seated herself in her decided way in the chair which St. John had drawn up for her. Her lips were tightly compressed, her eyes bright.

"Heathcote St. John," she began abruptly, "I know you very well, and I knew your uncle more years ago than it is agreeable to remember. I feel myself one of the family, therefore, and intend to act as such. In other words—I have come to make myself unpleasant. Is it true that Jeremy Harris is ruined and you with him?"

Heathcote felt wildly for his tie pin. His eyes were fixed on his wife's angry humiliated face.

"Eh—" he began. "Eh—"

"If you please, sir." It was the footman again. "Cook says the tea has run out, and she was told not to order in anything fresh—"

"Go to the devil!" said Heathcote in low concentrated accents.

The footman went—whether or not to the destination assigned to him by his irate master is not known—and there was a blank uncomfortable silence.

"I'm awfully sorry," Heathcote began at last, with a kind of wretched frankness. "You see—"

"Yes, I see," Adelaide Deschesney interrupted crisply. "You don't need to answer my question. Of course, I might tell you how sorry I am and all that sort of nonsense, but I haven't time and it wouldn't help you much. Instead, I'm going to be impertinent and ask more questions. What do you propose doing?"

"My wife is going home to her mother in Shropshire," St. John answered, thankful to be able to speak about one point at least with an appearance of businesslike clearness.

"And the dinner on the twenty-second?"

Mrs. St. John awoke out of her state of dreamy preoccupation to a return of her old angry revolt.

"Heathcote—Heathcote says we shall have to tell everybody—we can't give it."

"Most honorable of Heathcote, but very unpleasant. And then I suppose when you have made your confession and retired into the country to milk cows, or whatever one does there, while your husband runs odd errands for some office——"

"Don't," Cecilia burst out. "We don't want you to sympathize, but you needn't—needn't—" She broke off, battling against a threatening flood of tears, and Adelaide Deschesney smiled a smile of placid wisdom.

"My dear, I'm enjoying the luxury of being unpleasantly truthful, because I know I can pay for

it. I am going to do something which, I suppose, never occurred to a friend before—I propose to help you."

Mrs. St. John's eyes opened wide with an almost childish flash of hope, but her husband shook his head. He could not help himself and being a man he could not see how a woman could perform something beyond his own power.

"I'm afraid—" he began courteously.

"Please, don't interrupt. Would five thousand pounds a year be of any use to you for the time being?"

"My dear Mrs. Deschesney, it's tremendously good of you, but it's out of the question. I could not accept money—not even borrowed money——"

"My dear Mr. St. John, did I say anything about borrowed money? Seriously, do you think you have any security worth offering. Don't be foolish. I merely propose buying something from you at a price which I don't think will be outbidden."

Mrs. St. John looked wildly and instinctively at her rings; her husband, being wiser, looked at the valuable pictures on the wall.

"I'm afraid—" he began again, but his visitor interrupted him with a curt gesture.

"I want Baby Archibald," she said.

They looked at her in blank stupid silence, and she repeated her words slowly and with clear enunciation.

"I want Baby Archibald," adding, "when you have grasped that fact we can get on."

"You mean—" it was Mrs. St. John who this time recovered her speech first— "you mean—we—we should give you our son?"

"At the rate of five thousand pounds a year I should say 'sell,'" observed Mrs. Deschesney. "Still we won't quarrel over a word, and perhaps 'give' does sound nicer. At any rate, there's my offer. I want something young about me, and I'm fond of that baby, at least as fond as I can be of anything—and I'm prepared to do well by him and by you. So long as I live he shall be amply provided for, and you will be in steady receipt of the income I have already mentioned. At my death Archibald will receive the bulk of my fortune with the provision that he continues the usual payment to you. Of course, five thousand pounds may not keep you in quite your present style, but—"

"Don't!" said Mrs. St. John for the second time, but in another tone. Her knees shook under her, and she stretched out her hand blindly for support. "Don't! One doesn't sell one's own son—"

A grim, rather sarcastic smile twisted Adelaide Deschesney's composed lips.

"No, as a rule one doesn't," she admitted; "but you mustn't let the convenances get in your way—they are so easily arranged. Let us suppose—for instance—that you decided to travel in India for a few years. Baby Archibald could not possibly accompany you, and what would be more natural than that you should entrust him to an old friend of the family like myself? And when you do come back—

why, all sorts of things might have happened. Archibald might have set up an attachment for me and forgotten all about you—a splendid excuse to give the busybodies. You see, it is perfectly simple."

Mrs. St. John sat down opposite the woman whose clear steady voice had put unthought-of possibilities before them with the precision of a lawyer. She was now deadly pale, and her eyes were fixed on the fire as though she were afraid to lift them. Her husband took hold of the edge of the mantelpiece, seemingly in the attempt to steady himself.

"One's own flesh and blood—" he began hoarsely.

"Heathcote St. John, don't talk sentiment to me! People who live in Portman Square should be above all those feelings. They are altogether plebeian. And if you must have feelings at all, try and be unselfish for once in your life, and think of Baby Archibald. You owe that child something. You brought him into the world without so much as a 'by your leave,' and what have you to offer him? Nothing. And what do I offer him? Everything. You will admit, being civilized people, that money, and all that money means, is everything?" She waited a moment, looking from one to the other with a curious expression that was not altogether unlike that of suspense, but neither husband nor wife answered. "Come!" she went on impatiently. "Say something. Isn't it true?"

Mrs. St. John started as though from a dream, and looked at her husband. Their eyes met for a fleeting moment of question and answer.

"Of course," Heathcote said firmly. "Of course."

Mrs. St. John took a sharp breath.

"Of course," she said; "and besides, there is Archibald to consider." She spoke quickly, with a curious but scarcely noticeable catch in her voice. "And after all, we have nothing to offer him, and he is spoilt; he will miss things so—one does miss things so."

Heathcote nodded.

"We must be fair to him; and he won't miss us much, poor little chap. Only we can't accept the rest of your suggestion."

"So, it's pride now?" asked Adelaide Deschesney. "Really, it is just as if you were trying to run through the whole gamut of correct emotions, and it is so unnecessary—between old friends. You don't suppose I'm going to buy things and not pay for them? Don't be absurd! It's five thousand pounds a year and Baby Archibald's future, or nothing and no future for anybody. I hope you know by this time that I am accustomed to meaning what I say."

"It sounds horribly low down," said Heathcote dazedly. "I—I don't like it."

"Stuff and nonsense, Heathcote. What you

really mean is that you are afraid of other people thinking it what you gracefully call 'low down'! You're judging with a sort of public conscience and not in the least according to your own. At the bottom of your heart you know you'll be playing Archibald a shabby trick if you refuse. What have you to offer him? Parental affection? Bosh! You haven't got any. What did you offer him? Historical dadoes and expensive toys and the best of everything. How do you expect he is going to get on without them? What will Baby Archibald do in a boarding-house sitting-room cooped up with you all day? Break his heart! You're nothing to him, he's nothing to you, and it's criminal hypocrisy to pretend."

"I dare say you're right," Heathcote admitted miserably. "If only you'd leave out the five thousand pounds a year!"

"I shan't. I will not allow Archibald to undergo the humiliation in later years of having to recognize two down-at-heels, feckless beings as his parents. I will not lay myself open to the charge of having allowed them to sink socially to the bottom. If he can't love and respect you, he at least shan't have to be ashamed of you. I have given you my reasons for my bargain. Take it or leave it, but if you have the slightest consideration for that deeply wronged mortal—your son—you'll take it."

Mrs. St. John rose suddenly to her feet.

"And—if we consented—could I—we see him sometimes?"

"By all means—if you didn't interfere."

Again husband and wife looked at each other with the same intense unspoken question. Adelaide Deschesney stared steadily into the fire, and only the sharpest observer would have noticed the bitter smile which passed like a shadow over her lips.

"Heathcote——" Mrs. St. John began faintly.

"I think we have not the right to refuse," her husband went on, almost as though to prevent her speaking. "I believe—I know—that you'll be everything that's good to—our son—more than we've been to him, probably—and—and——"

Mrs. Deschesney rose and stood stiff and erect, her eyes shining like two sharp points of light.

"Putting aside appropriate sentimentalities, I understand that you consent," she said. "Is that so?"

The shortest possible hesitation.

"Yes, that's so," Heathcote answered.

"I presume you will start on your travels shortly after your dinner on the twenty-second. In that case I should like to receive Archibald some days before. You could help smooth over the change."

Heathcote put his hand to his collar.

"On the eighteenth, then?"

"That will suit me very well." She held out her hand. "And now I suppose I need not express my

sympathy. People with five thousand pounds a year don't require sympathy, do they?"

He gave a short uneasy laugh.

"No, of course not."

She refused the offer of his escort with a curt gesture.

"On the eighteenth I shall have everything ready; also the check for the first year," she said. "I hope your dinner will be a great success. For my part, I shan't be there; I shall be too busy. Good-by."

She went out, and the door closed behind her with an ominous threatening bang. Husband and wife were left standing opposite each other.

"We're out of the mess, anyhow," Heathcote said.

"Yes—out of the mess," she echoed.

But this time they avoided each other's eyes.

CHAPTER XIII

GOING, GOING, GONE

BABY Archibald was playing "bears" in the passage, and as he was accustomed to playing that adventurous game without the disagreeable element of the bears themselves, he screamed when the drawing-room door opened suddenly, emitting a tall dark something which might, with the help of a little imagination, have been taken for a grizzly. The gun having missed fire, Baby Archibald was about to make discretion the better part of valor, when a firm, not unkindly hand caught him by the shoulder and turned him round.

"Come, now, you know who I am," said Adelaide Deschesney. "You frightened little fellow, what are you doing?"

"Killing bears," Archibald explained with recovered dignity. "The place is full of them, you know."

"Yes, I know," she said. "In that case, perhaps, you'd be so kind as to see me down-stairs—I'm naturally of a nervous disposition."

The proposition met wholly with Archibald's approval. It was getting dusk, and the imaginary

wild beasts were becoming substantial realities in proportion to the deepening of the shadows. So that he was not at all unwilling to act as escort to a large safe-looking person. So he thrust his small, somewhat hot hand into hers and proceeded down the passage.

It was a long passage, and a beautiful one, in so far that the walls were covered with valuable pictures which stared down at the passer-by with a pompous consciousness of their own worth. Possibly Adelaide Deschesney proved one too much for them, for she returned their gaze with a contemptuous criticism, and came to a halt beneath the portrait of an extremely plain and severe-looking gentleman whose chief attractions were a wart on the side of an irregular nose and an immense ruffle. He and three or four others of a like caliber had been the gifts of Uncle Jeremy, who had felt it incumbent upon him to supply the family of St. John with ancestors. Mrs. Deschesney defied the cavaliers' insolent stare for a full minute, then she glanced down at her escort.

"Tell me, Archie," she said (she was one of the few who ever reduced his name from its full-length dignity), "would you mind if you had to leave all these pretty things?"

Archibald looked up, vaguely surprised at the repetition of a question which he had answered once before.

"Oh, no," he said. "I've got to, you know."

"You've got to? What do you mean?"

"It's a secret," said Archibald mysteriously. "A big secret."

"Whose secret, you extraordinary little boy?"

"Mine and——" he stopped short with a little gasp. "I'm very sorry," he said rather stiffly. "I can't say."

"Can't say? Why not?"

"I promised."

Mrs. Deschesney smiled grimly.

"Rash young man! You shouldn't make promises at your time of life. However, I respect your scruples."

"Thank you," said Baby Archibald, who, though he did not know in the least what scruples were or why they should be respected, felt the necessity of continuing the display of his best manners. At the same time he wondered very much why the lady to whom he was offering his protection was looking at him with such earnestness. It made him feel vaguely uncomfortable. He could not remember any particular transgression, but one never knew how naughty one had been until one was told.

"Tell me, Baby Archibald," said the lady suddenly, "do you like me?"

He stared solemnly up at her. Without being able to formulate the idea into words, he felt somehow that she was lacking in modesty. And then he didn't quite know and he was exceedingly anxious to be both truthful and polite. Did he like

Mrs. Deschesney? He liked buns and jam and Tilda, the scullery maid—the latter in moderation—and Mrs. Deschesney bore no resemblance to either of these objects of his affection.

"I 'spect so," he said finally and with great caution.

"You suspect so? I wonder if you like me well enough to live with me, Archie?"

"Always?"

"Well, for a long time?"

"All alone?"

"I don't think a chaperon will be exactly necessary."

He was silent for a moment, struggling hopelessly with the big words and the big feelings that hadn't got any words at all, and a vague inclination to cry.

"Mother wouldn't," he said with a gulp.

"Wouldn't what, you quaint little mite?"

"Wouldn't let me."

"Do you mean that she is too fond of you?"

"'Spect so."

But somehow the small voice sounded less certain. Mrs. Deschesney turned her back on the cavalier gentleman and proceeded on her way down the passage measuring her pace to suit the short legs of her companion.

"You see, Archie, I'm very fond of you, too. It's a funny thing, but I am. I'm what is called a soured old woman, which means not very happy,

and I have a fancy that if I had something small and young about me—like you—I might become quite agreeable again. Would you mind trying?" She was smiling a little in her usual half-mocking way, but Archibald liked the sound of her voice better than he had ever done before.

"I couldn't leave mother," he persisted, but not rudely. "I couldn't. But p'raps if I asked the——"

He stopped short and clasped the cool hand in a spasm of alarm. They had turned the corner of the passage, and a single electric light burning over a valuable "old master" revealed the figure of a man who was gazing up, note-book in hand.

"Jer——"

"Goblin."

The two broken and wholly unintelligible exclamations escaped simultaneously, and the man turned with a start, his red bulldog face half amused, half alarmed.

"I beg your pardon," he began, and shut his note-book. "I beg your pardon——"

For a full minute they stared at each other. Archibald, having overcome the first shock, felt that something very unusual had happened. People in polite society do not stare—this was a fact which had been repeatedly submitted to his notice. They either bow or shake hands or pass on. These two stared in the most unabashed way possible and Archibald could only suppose that Mrs. Deschesney knew more about goblins than he had thought pos-

sible. At any rate, it was Mrs. Deschesney who at last broke the embarrassing silence.

"Would you mind telling me what you are doing here?" she asked with dignity.

"With pleasure. I am taking a memorandum of the pictures. This one—for instance——"

"Thank you. I know considerably more about that picture than you do. I want to know what you are doing here."

The man in the ill-fitting brown suit shuffled.

"If you please, I'm Samuels, of Greene and Greene, auctioneers," he explained meekly. "I'm valuing things." At the same time he glanced at Archibald and one eye closed surreptitiously. "May I offer you my card?"

"No, thank you. If you really are valuing things, then I can only say I'm extremely sorry to hear it. Somebody is going to be badly 'had.' You can't tell a Gainsborough from an oleograph, and you know it, Jer—Mr. Samuels."

"I know it," he admitted humbly, "but I assure you I'm doing my very best——"

"That makes things worse. If you shut your eyes and contented yourself with guessing, there would be more hope. And pray, Mr. Samuels"—she gave the name a sarcastic emphasis—"who else may you be?"

"A ruined man trying to earn an honest penny," he said. "I—I hope, Adelaide, you won't give me away."

"My name is now Mrs. Deschesney," she corrected frigidly. "As to 'giving you away,' I really don't know what you mean. You don't mean to tell me that no one knows?"

"No one," he said, and his voice sank with mysteriousness while his eye rested on Archibald. "There's only one person who really knows who I am, and he is under an oath of secrecy."

Archibald's face lighted up for a moment, but he said nothing, and there was a strained silence.

"Do you mean to tell me that Heathcote doesn't know?"

"How should he?" with an air of amiable innocence. "After all, Heathcote hasn't seen me since he was a boy, and you can understand that I haven't exactly introduced myself."

"I can understand that very well indeed. Yours would not be an inspiriting welcome, I'm afraid. The prodigal uncle! You really have made an inconceivable mess of things."

"I suppose I have."

"There is no supposing about it. It's a very obvious fact. What do you think is going to happen to these luckless folk?"

"I don't know. Heathcote will have to turn out and do something."

"Heathcote!" in great scorn. "Heathcote can't do anything, and even if he could he wouldn't do it. Once you started them off in this grand style it was your business to keep them going——"

"My dear Adelaide, I couldn't help the mine going wrong, could I?"

"I really don't know what you could or could not have done. I suppose you made and lost your money exactly in the same way as you are valuing these pictures—shut your eyes and trusted to luck how things turned out——"

"My dear Adelaide——"

"I have already pointed out to you, Mr. Samuels, that I am called Adelaide only by my intimate friends. At the same time I must confess that it is a relief to me to hear that it was a mine. I expected worse."

Mr. Samuels' expression was aggrieved.

"Surely, knowing as you do, the stability and respectability of my character——"

"I know nothing of the sort. You were—shall we say—erratic in your boyhood, and I have no reason, to judge from your present occupation, to change my opinion."

Mr. Samuels sighed.

"You never did and never will let me finish my sentences," he complained. "There is only one thing I can say in my defense, and that is—I've always been true to at least one principle in my life." He waited as though expecting her to say something. "I'm not married," he added solemnly.

"I should think not. You don't look like it."

Another silence.

Mrs. Deschesney stared at Mr. Samuels, and Mr. Samuels stroked his shabby coat-collar apologetically.

"I'm afraid I've changed," he said. "I'm not so handsome as I was."

"H'm! Were you ever handsome?"

"I flattered myself—but, of course, time does deal unkindly with a bankrupt bachelor. You, Mrs. Deschesney, have grown, if anything, more beautiful. I hope Mr. Deschesney is well?"

"Mr. Deschesney is dead," she said with increasing severity.

"Oh!" He did not apologize, and his "Oh" did not express any particular degree of regret. "And now I suppose you are acting as comforting angel in this house of desolation?" he went on.

"On the contrary, I'm buying from the wreckage."

"Oh, that comes into my sphere, doesn't it?" He slapped open his note-book. "Let me see——"

"Look it up under 'Babies,'" she suggested.

"I beg your pardon?"

"I said 'Babies,'" she repeated. "As a matter of fact, though, the auction is over, so you don't need to interfere."

"You mean——" all the color had gone out of his ruddy face. "You mean they've sold——"

"Yes, that's what I mean."

"Their own flesh and blood?"

"Oh, my dear Jer—Mr. Samuels—how can you be so commonplace! Of course, they don't do it for their own sakes, you understand."

"I don't believe it."

"What don't you believe—the sale? Do you know what a nice, clean, well-brought-up baby costs nowadays? You don't? You're a pretty sort of auctioneer, aren't you? Price of one baby—five thousand pounds. Going, going, gone! The price is an absolutely fair one."

"I don't believe it!" he repeated. "At least—I mean I don't believe they'll do it."

"Don't you know that people will do anything for money?" she said with a sudden seriousness.

He winced and then drew himself up.

"I know that was always your idea," he said. "You believe that you can buy everything and everybody, and that everybody wants to be bought. In the old days you thought that I was just one of those who hung about you because of your infer—eh—wealth. I wasn't. I've proved since that if I want money I can make it——"

"And lose it," she interposed.

"Exactly. In any case, you were wrong then and you are wrong to-day."

"Prove it."

"Time will prove it. I'm willing to wager."

"What have you got to wager—your salary?"

"Better than that—a secret."

"That's a misuse of feminine curiosity. However, it will pass. What are my stakes to be?"

"Shall we say—the permission to call on you?"

"As Mr. Samuels?"

"I *have* another suit," he said with humility. "Anyhow, you can pretend that I'm the furniture man if you like. I don't want to shame you before your butler."

"Thank you. Sh!"

Somewhere along the passage a door had been opened, and footsteps were heard coming in their direction.

"Come, Archibald!" said Adelaide Deschesney. She swept past Mr. Samuels, of Greene and Greene, auctioneers, and left him standing there, gazing up blankly at the "old master."

CHAPTER XIV

A FRIEND OF THE FAMILY

NUMBER — Portman Square was in that unlovely state of confusion which attends removals, auctions and other unpleasantnesses—that is to say, a furniture van decorated the curb outside the house, green-aproned individuals lounged superciliously on the stairs, occasionally transferring some article from one place to another by way of breaking the monotony; pictures, sideboards, chairs and tables littered the passages, and a spirit of desolation stared out of the curtainless windows. It was with the greatest difficulty that Mrs. Smythe managed to pick her way through and over the various impedimenta, but she was upheld by a winged and unconquerable determination to find out everything there was to be found out, and it is not likely that a woman of her character would be thwarted by a few odd pieces of furniture. Mr. Adams, the footman, was lounging in the hall, watching the proceedings with a strongly disapproving eye, but by a clever feint she managed to escape his attention and entered the drawing-room with a flourish of cheerful friendliness.

"My dear Mrs. St. John!" she exclaimed, holding out both hands, "I hope I have not disturbed you, but I saw the door open and so I thought I would come in without any formality—*sans ceremonie,* as the French say." Whether the French would have pleaded guilty to pronouncing the phrase after Mrs. Smythe's methods is as doubtful as her statement concerning the open door, but Mrs. St. John accepted the statement and accent with a rather tired sigh of resignation.

"We are just in the midst of packing up our household gods," she said, indicating the wooden cases which littered the center of the room. "Some of the things are so breakable that we have to attend to the packing ourselves. Heathcote, do be careful! You are just going to knock over the Dresden shepherdess." St. John straightened himself. He looked heated and anxious, but he succeeded in attaining a manner of facetious light-heartedness.

"Turned packer in my old age, you see, Mrs. Smythe!" he said. "That's all we idle rich are good for, you know." Both Mrs. Smythe and his wife laughed heartily over the jest. Mrs. St. John indeed laughed so heartily that when she left off there were tears in her eyes, and she forgot to ask her visitor to sit down. But Mrs. Smythe never stood on ceremony, and having found a free place on the sofa, she installed herself amid a creaking and crackling of stiff silk and the clatter of innumerable gold objects dangling at the end of a heavy

gold chain. Had Mrs. Smythe been wrecked on a desert island with nothing but her chatelaine to protect her she would have been armed for all contingencies. Puff boxes, cigarette cases, match boxes, lorgnettes, pocket knives, pencils—a veritable jeweler's shop jangled to her every movement, and with the rustle of silk proclaimed to the world an exceeding opulence.

"To think that you should be leaving our neighborhood!" she said, claiming the full distinction of living "just off Portman Square." "I was quite upset when I heard the news, and of course, as a friend of the family, I had to come round and see if it was really true."

"It's quite true," Mrs. St. John answered with marked cheerfulness. "The idea came quite suddenly, and you know we are such people of impulse."

"Oh!" observed Mrs. Smythe uncertainly. She was feeling a trifle nonplused by the manner of her two hosts, who, according to the situation, ought to have been plunged in the lowest depths of depression. Was this cheerfulness genuine or not? That was the question. There was something about Mrs. St. John's manner and appearance that was suspiciously exuberant—altogether too exuberant. Mrs. Smythe's ferret-like eyes noted the fact with satisfaction before they passed on to Mr. St. John, who, being a man, was more likely to betray himself. That gentleman, feeling the piercing gaze, turned

crimson, and with common injustice threw the blame on his faultless collar, which, however, appeared to cause him considerable trouble.

"Yes, we are going, Mrs. Smythe," he said, as though conscious that he was expected to give away the true state of affairs and defending himself feebly against his fate. "We were getting tired of London, you know—and besides, the boy—you know—er, we found that the climate——" He broke off, having found that his wife was staring at him with a look of blank horror in her eyes, and endeavored to cover his confusion by plunging back into the shavings which filled the packing cases. Mrs. Smythe's eyebrows rose.

"Oh," she said again, "so you are leaving London altogether?"

"Oh, yes, we are starting on a tour round the world, you know," Mr. St. John went on determined to distinguish himself somehow. "India first, of course, and then——"

"Surely you are not going to take a delicate child to all those unhealthy places!" the visitor broke in indignantly. Heathcote raised his flushed face to stare.

"Of course not!" he said. "Of course not——"

"But you said the climate——"

"Er, yes, the climate——" Heathcote stammered woefully.

"That was what my husband meant," Mrs. St. John exclaimed hastily. "Of course we can not

take Archibald with us—and at the same time we must travel. My husband's health——"

"Oh, your husband's health!" echoed the lady on the sofa, and her glance wandered to the scarlet-faced gentleman, whose disease—if it existed—must have been of a creeping and subtle kind. St. John, taking his cue, passed his hand wearily across his forehead, and was heard to mutter something that sounded like "stress" and "business."

"Appearances are so deceptive," Mrs. St. John went on glibly, "but the doctor said a nervous breakdown was imminent and advised prolonged traveling. We shall probably be away a year or two."

"And your dear little boy!" gushed the visitor, determined not to let go until the matter was sieved to the bottom. "What are you going to do with him?"

"An old friend of the family has promised to take care of him," Mrs. St. John explained, but the color had suddenly deepened in her cheeks, "Mrs. Deschesney—I believe you know her?" Mrs. Smythe threw back her head and laughed.

"What, dear Adelaide?" she exclaimed, "dear Adelaide with a child! Why, she knows no more about children than—than the man in the moon!"

There was an uncomfortable silence. Mrs. St. John bit her lip and then returned valiantly to the fray.

"At any rate, she seems very fond of Archibald,"

she said. "I am sure she will be good to him and that we could not leave him in better hands! And—then he likes her so much—you know."

"But surely he will feel the parting very much—and how will you bear it, dear Mrs. St. John? You must be so fond of him." Cecilia St. John's head sank a little.

"Yes, of course," she said. "We—I shall feel it terribly—but I don't think he will mind. He is such a very little boy. He will not understand, and when he does understand he won't mind any more. And, besides——" She looked round half defiantly, half appealingly, as though she were asking some one to endorse her statements. "And, besides, it is for his good." Her husband nodded gravely.

"Yes, for his good," he echoed, and for the first time he spoke without uneasiness, though there was the same faint question in his voice as had marked his wife's tone. "We shall miss the little chap, but we can't help ourselves—we haven't any choice in the matter—at least no real choice." He looked across at his wife, but she avoided his eyes and he turned his attention to the Dresden shepherdess. "Mrs. Deschesney is such an old friend," he muttered apologetically. "We have the utmost confidence——"

"Otherwise we couldn't do it," his wife put in firmly. "Of course you can quite understand——"

It was obvious that Mrs. Smythe did not understand, and that she wished she did. There was a

faint sour smile about her thin mouth, as she put the final test question.

"And so I suppose your dinner on the twenty-second will be a farewell one?" she queried. "Will you give it here or——"

"We have arranged for a private dining-room at the Carlton," said Mrs. St. John, enunciating each word as though it gave her a peculiar satisfaction. "The house is in too much of a disorder, and we are starting on the twenty-fifth. I hope, however, it will go off as well there as here."

"Oh, I am sure." Mrs. Smythe was blinking hard like a ferret that has been brought up suddenly from a rabbit-hole. Paupers who gave dinners at the Carlton were altogether a new species for her, and mentally she had already raised the St. Johns to the position of well-to-do bankrupts. She rose in all the magnificence of her calling dress and stretched out an immaculately gloved hand. The offer was not so cordial as that at her arrival—at the bottom of her heart she was feeling aggrieved, for it is very disappointing when one has come with the intention of being a Job's comforter (with an eye to scandal) to find that there is nothing to lament about. "We shall miss you very much," she said graciously. "And that reminds me, Mr. St. John, who was that charming girl I saw you with in the park the other day? I didn't recognize her as any one in our set, but she was so unusual that I felt I had to ask—so artistic-looking, and you know

how interested I am in artistic people. If I could have found Mrs. St. John anywhere about I should have insisted on an introduction. Now, *do* tell me!"

Heathcote stared at her for a moment with unfeigned innocence. To connect Elizabeth Jones with the artistic did not occur to him—nor did the whole depth and import of the incident penetrate until a moment later when by the merest chance he caught a glimpse of his wife's face. Mrs. St. John was looking at him with a faint ironical amusement in her bright eyes. The amusement was not less genuine because sharpened by an anger that he did not at all understand, and suddenly Heathcote knew that he had flushed up for the fifth time in the course of that unhappy afternoon.

"I'd almost forgotten," he said recklessly. "I expect you are alluding to Miss Jones. I don't suppose you do know her, Mrs. Smythe——"

"But she's an old school friend of mine," his wife put in carelessly. "She came down for the day to see us before we left and Heathcote took her out to show her the park. I'm sorry I wasn't there. I could have introduced you—as you say, she is so artistic, and I'm sure you would have got on capitally. Must you really go?"

"I really must." Mrs. Smythe, who was a scandal-monger only for lack of a better profession and spiteful only because it was the only emotion for which her life gave scope, retained an undaunted graciousness. "But I'm so glad to have seen you

and I do hope you will soon be better, Mr. St. John."

"Oh, yes," that gentleman returned with an uneasy attempt at ease. "A few weeks abroad will soon set me up, the doctors told me. A little heart trouble, you know——"

"Nerves, I thought you said?" Mrs. Smythe put in suavely.

"Oh, yes—nerves, of course." St. John caught his wife's horrified eyes and blushed again. "The modern complaints are so confusing," he finished lamely.

Mrs. Smythe smiled. "They are indeed," she agreed. "No, dear Mr. St. John, I wouldn't think of letting you come down-stairs with me. I can find my way quite well—and stairs are so bad for the heart—nerves, I mean. Good-by, good-by! I am so looking forward to the twenty-second!"

With an amiable wave of the hand she sailed gracefully down the broad staircase, carefully avoiding a green-aproned person who was resting at the bottom of the step, and so passed out of the house. Mrs. St. John turned and looked at her husband. There were tears of anger in her eyes, but her pretty mouth wore a smile of triumph.

"Oh, how I hate that woman!" she exclaimed. "Oh!" The "Oh!" was expressive of so much condensed, not very charitable, feeling that Heathcote St. John gasped.

"My dear——" he began.

"She just came to spy on us, and triumph over

us," she answered incoherently. "I could see the disappointment in her face." And then suddenly, as though yielding to an irresistible impulse, she flung herself into her husband's arms. "Oh, thank goodness Adelaide came to help us!" she cried wildly. "I couldn't have borne the disgrace—I couldn't. Oh, what a good thing it is!"

"Yes, isn't it?" He patted her mechanically. He had rarely felt so awkward in his life. And yet it gave him an odd sensation of pleasure, almost of comfort, to hold this very lovely piece of womanhood in his arms and to feel, or at any rate to imagine, for the first time in their lives she was clinging to him as to a comrade. It was a very momentary pleasure. Mrs. St. John recovered rapidly. She stiffened and drew back, looking up into his face with a half mischievous, half angry laugh.

"But we routed *her* in fine style, didn't we?" she said. "The silly old thing!" And then, with an increasing hardness of tone, "And now, perhaps, you'll tell me about Miss Jones, Heathcote," she said.

Meanwhile Mrs. Smythe had turned the all important corner and was busy with the results of her interview.

"I wonder who of these two is the bigger liar, and what they are lying about!" she said aloud. "I wonder!"

Which proved conclusively that Mrs. Smythe was not so silly as she looked.

CHAPTER XV

SAVING THE SITUATION

"OF course, it was most awfully decent of you, Cecilia," said Heathcote, gazing with fixed attention at the end of his cigarette. "You fairly winded me, you know, and I still don't quite see why you did it, but it was decent of you anyhow. I must say when it comes to the scratch you really are—white right through."

He was being more than usually slangy, but under his casual matter-of-fact manner there was genuine panic. In the last hour his nerve had been badly shaken and the present situation did not tend to increase his composure.

"Thanks," said Mrs. St. John. She had retired to the fireplace and a very considerable space divided them, both in the matter of emotion and actual distance. "Your eulogy reminds me somewhat of a soap advertisement," she added in the same tone of frigid good humor. "But I know your descriptive powers are limited and I take it as well meant. As to my reasons for claiming intimacy with this—what's her name?"

"Jones—Elizabeth Jones."

"Ah, yes, Jones. Her Christian name does not affect me, thank you, Heathcote. They are very simple, and the desire to do you a good turn was not one of them. It was a matter of principle. Whatever our relations may be in private, Heathcote, they must at least be presentable when we take them out for an airing in public. I did not wish that Smythe woman to scandal-monger more than I could help—that's all."

"I see," said Heathcote. He found nothing else to say since gratitude was obviously out of place, and his wife glanced at him with a freezing air of detachment.

"All the same, Heathcote," she went on pleasantly, "I think you might tell me about Miss Jones. Under the circumstances I surely deserve to have a legitimate curiosity satisfied. You see, the incident shows you up in quite a new light, doesn't it?"

"Does it?" queried Heathcote. He was feeling sullen, browbeaten. In the contest that loomed ahead he already saw himself badly worsted, and he vested himself in truculent defiance.

"Yes, it does, really. I never thought you had it in you, Heathcote. And in the park, too, of all the places! It was more and less than courageous—it was absolutely reckless, daring. Did you want everybody to realize what a really bad lot you are?"

"I don't see——" Heathcote began. And then he caught sight of her mocking face and relapsed into an increasingly sulky silence.

"Is she very pretty, Heathcote?"

"Very."

"And what is she? Something artistic, I presume from Mrs. Smythe's description?"

"She is—was, I should say, one of the Lincoln's Beautiful Bevy," St. John stated with splendid calm.

"A chorus girl——"

"A ballet-girl."

"Oh! 'Was,' I think you said?"

St. John nodded. Secretly he was horrified at himself, but his wife's tone had been nicely calculated to drive him to extremities. Had she accused him of highway robbery he would have assented with the same cold-blooded effrontery. Mrs. St. John was silent a moment.

"It's really very amusing," she said at last. "The funniest point of all seems to me your indignation on the score of my patronage—my acquaintanceship, if you like—with Mr. Simpson. You inferred that I had the choice between backing you up or the musician and that I backed the musician. Do you know, there was a moment when I felt positively guilty? Now I am wondering how much your patronage of art has cost you. Has, perhaps, Miss Jones an extravagant taste in pearls?"

"Cecilia!" He very nearly lost his placidity, but with the help of the eye-glass recovered in time and regarded his wife with a chilly displeasure almost equal to her own. "I do not think you are displaying the best possible taste, Cecilia," he commented.

"No? To tell you the truth, Heathcote, I don't think that either of us is very good form!" She got up as though suddenly restless and her tone sounded less mocking. "Right from the beginning we've been bad form—right from our marriage. Bargaining like that isn't nice, you know, however widely it is sanctified—it isn't nice chiefly because it doesn't work out nicely. And now there's Baby Archibald. He didn't come into our reckoning and now—now we're selling him. No, don't protest, please, Heathcote. We are, you know. It's partly for his sake, of course—we're selling him because we know we aren't fit to keep him. Only it's beginning to dawn on me—that—that we oughtn't to have had him if we couldn't stand by him—properly."

St. John looked at her helplessly. Her usual childish petulance was replaced by a weary kind of dignity.

"I don't see what we're to do," he began.

"My dear Heathcote, there is nothing to be done. You can't change your character, can you?"

"No more than you can change yours," he retorted sulkily.

"Exactly. And so we both sought our consolation outside the bargain—according to our tastes. I, on my side, am satisfied to encourage a noble struggle, and you—well, you have—Miss Jones!"

The Dresden shepherdess lay shattered in a thousand fragments.

"It's intolerable!" said Heathcote St. John. He

stood there in the midst of the ruin, his clenched hand on the table, his small face ablaze. Mrs. St. John glanced at him swiftly, curiously, out of the corner of her eyes and shrugged her shoulders.

"How impetuous you are, Heathcote," she said. "That was the only piece of china in the whole house I cared about. And why lose your temper?"

"Isn't it enough to make any man lose his temper to hear his wife openly declare she prefers—admires a twopence, halfpenny, out-of-elbows piano thumper——"

He stopped short before her white anger.

"To jeer at any man ill becomes you, Heathcote," she said cuttingly. "If it were not for Archibald you would not be worth even so much as twopence halfpenny, and I doubt if you would own a coat of any sort, out-of-elbows or otherwise. Mr. Simpson is what he has made himself. And he hasn't sold his birthright for a mess of pottage." She gave a weary little gesture. "Why quarrel? I'm not reproaching *you,* am I? We are both what you would describe as rotters and it's no good calling each other names."

He did not see it, but there were tears in her eyes as she turned away from him. "You're perfectly welcome to your friend, Heathcote."

"Cecilia——"

The door opened. Adams, severe and disapproving, but eminently on his dignity, made his appearance.

"If you please, madam, a person to see you."

"For goodness' sake—what sort of a person?"

"A person from a registry office, madam."

"Oh, yes, of course. Show her in. Heathcote, you'd better go. It's probably a maid after a position. I couldn't keep Therese—she was too expensive and too impertinent. I don't think we have anything more to say to each other, have we?"

"No, nothing," said Heathcote.

The moment when he might have explained was gone forever. He had the feeling as he walked toward the door that everything was over and that nothing that happened now could possibly matter. But as the door opened he changed his mind. There were, it appeared, depths of unpleasant shocks which he was yet to fathom.

Miss Elizabeth Jones stood on the threshold.

They stared at each other. Miss Jones' jaw had dropped. She looked peculiarly plain and pathetically stupid in her utter bewilderment. She wore her best clothes and her hat was, as usual, a little over one ear.

"Mr. St. John," she said faintly.

Adams withdrew, either from a feeling of tact or of disgust. Heathcote advanced slowly. His forehead was damp with perspiration, but he held out his hand with an unflinching welcome.

"Why, of all the people on earth!" he said, and then he turned and faced his wife defiantly. "Cecilia," he said, "this is a friend of mine—Miss Elizabeth Jones."

He did not know what was likely to happen. Had an earthquake swallowed him up he would not have cared or felt any particular surprise. Mrs. St. John had risen. Her face was quite calm and expressed nothing but a gentle amiability.

"A friend of yours, Heathcote? That's very nice. Miss Jones, won't you come and sit down?" She looked past Miss Jones and her eyes encountered Heathcote's with an unmistakable significance. "Heathcote, when you've spoken to Mr. Samuels please come up again, won't you?"

St. John hesitated. He felt that retreat was mean and cowardly. What was likely to pass between these two? Yet Cecilia's eyes were imperative—with perhaps the faintest gleam of humor in their brightness—and she had undoubtedly saved the situation. He drew a breath of relief.

"Oh, certainly. Delighted."

He fled. To all appearances it was a slow dignified going about his business, but in reality it was flight, and probably both women knew it. When the door closed they looked at each other, curiously and critically on both sides, but with Miss Jones there was a timid apologetic admiration.

"Won't you sit down, Miss Jones?"

"Oh, no, thank you—I never knew—never thought——"

"I quite understand. I never supposed you did. My husband is not a good actor, and I have never

seen him look so agonized. I sent him away because men are so extraordinarily stupid and——"

"Please—Mrs. St. John—you don't understand. Mr. St. John was so kind—it was like him to pretend—but it's a mistake. He called me a friend, but indeed we're not. We couldn't be—there's such a difference——" Her words tumbled over one another and the thin hands in the black cotton gloves were clasped together in an agony of appeal. "It was wrong of me to recognize him—I know it was—but I was so surprised and—and——"

"But why shouldn't you recognize him," interrupted Mrs. St. John pleasantly. "Why shouldn't you be friends?"

She seated herself in one of the few unencumbered chairs and motioned to another, but Miss Jones remained standing. Her thin face was flushed and earnest.

"It was wrong, Mrs. St. John," she said breathlessly. "I always knew it. That day we walked in the park and I told him things—I felt so ashamed. But he wouldn't listen. He's so good and noble and generous——"

Mrs. St. John looked up.

"Oh!" she said under her breath.

"——he doesn't mind what people think or how poor—and—common one is—if any one's in trouble——"

"Were you in trouble?"

"I'd lost my job," was the husky answer.

There was a moment's silence. Mrs. St. John was studying the quaint figure before her with puzzled interest. So this was Heathcote's beautiful ballet-girl with a possible thirst for pearls. It was all very puzzling, very unaccountable. Somehow, Mrs. Heathcote was not so angry or so bitter as she had been. There was even a gentle reasonableness in her manner when she spoke again that Heathcote himself would not have recognized.

"So you were one of the Beautiful Bevy?" she said. "And you lost your job?"

"Yes, Mrs. St. John. I was only in the eighth row. No one could see me—hardly—only Mr. St. John saw me." She still spoke breathlessly and incoherently. "He picked me out," she said.

"Picked you out—why?"

There was a little painful hesitation.

"Because—I—I was ugly—and miserable——"

Mrs. St. John looked down. Being a woman, she had counted the cost of that one little sentence.

"Miss Jones," she said gently, "we don't need to discuss your suitability as—as my prospective—companion. I think we both feel it wouldn't do quite. But I should like to understand a little better—I should like to know all you care to tell me."

There was another little silence.

"There isn't much, Mrs. St. John. Only, Mr. St. John is so good and noble——"

"I'm glad you think so highly of my husband, Miss Jones."

"No one knows how good he is," the girl went on fervidly. "Most men are so different—not like him. Perhaps you don't know, madam—no one knew—it was his only pleasure after his long day's work to go round to the halls and pick out some one like me—some one who looked as though no one cared for her—and then to send her flowers—and—money—and make her a bit happier—giving her a day off, he called it. And no one ever knew where it all came from. But I found out. I'm the only one that's ever thanked him." There was a dim humble sort of pride in her rather common voice. Mrs. Heathcote stared blindly in front of her.

"Yes?" she said.

"And then the day I got—got thrown out I met him again. I—I had been crying—and he saw. I think he'd been in trouble, too—some uncle who'd gone wrong and whom he had to set up again, he said, and he asked me to tell him everything. So he took me into the park and I told him everything—about my job and Mr. Simpson——"

"Mr. Simpson?"

The girl flushed apologetically.

"He was my fiancée then, you see—and——"

"Isn't he any more?"

"Oh, no, not now."

"Why not?" Miss Jones' pale eyes looked up fearfully and Mrs. St. John added quickly and rather impatiently, "I'm afraid my questions may seem impertinent, but I am deeply interested. You are showing me my husband in a new light, and it is only natural that I should like to know more. Besides—I—have heard of Mr. Simpson."

"Oh, yes, he's to be a great musician," the girl said dully. "When he was just like other people we—we were very fond of each other. But now I'm not good enough. And I don't understand music or believe enough in him. Men like to be believed in."

"Oh, I see," said Mrs. St. John thoughtfully.

"I didn't think much of his music," Miss Jones went on. "I wanted him to go back to his grocery business for he's first-rate at that sort of thing though he hates to be told so. You should have seen him with the customers, madam! He'd have made anybody believe anything."

"Except his music?"

The girl sighed.

"That was only me. And there was a time when he wasn't quite sure himself either. I think he'd got a bit of a hanker after the shop and I was beginning to hope. Then he got a fine lady friend who said he was a genius—and helped him—and then the shop wasn't good enough—and he saw that I was ugly and stupid—and it's all over."

Her voice broke. Mrs. St. John sat very quiet

and did not lift her eyes from the shattered fragments of the Dresden shepherdess.

"Do you know who the fine lady is?" she asked.

"No, I don't want to. If she makes him great and famous I'll be glad—for his sake. But if he is only a great lady's whim—if she makes a fool of him—"

"A fool of him! Good gracious—" Mrs. St. John rose suddenly to her feet. "What do you mean, Miss Jones?"

"I don't quite know, madam," the girl said with a dull obstinacy. "But there are fine folk that do that sort of thing. They pick up some young fellow and have him educated and spoil him for his work and make a fuss over him and then when he isn't all they thought or they get tired—they drop him. And if that happens to Harold it'll break his heart."

"But if he is a genius—" Mrs. St. John broke in despairingly. "Oughtn't one to help geniuses?"

"Geniuses get along all right without anybody," was the wise answer. "And Harold isn't a genius. He's a grocer." Her voice vibrated with a sudden vehemence. "I wish there wasn't such a thing as a piano—I wish he'd never seen one and I wish his fine lady—"

"Oh, no, don't, please!" said Mrs. St. John hastily. "She may mean well, you know." She caught sight of Miss Jones' twisted tear-stained face. "My poor girl!"

"It's very kind of you to say so," said Miss Jones dejectedly. "I oughtn't to have spoken like that. But I've been very miserable. If it hadn't been for Mr. St. John I'd have lost hope. He's been so good and kind—"

"I see," said Mrs. St. John. She was smiling to herself. Suddenly she turned and held out her hand. "Miss Jones, I'll be quite honest with you. When I first heard about you, I confess, I thought differently from what I do now. I didn't understand. But now I'm glad you are Mr. St. John's friend and glad he helped you. I'm glad about quite a lot of things—especially of the chance that brought you here. It has made a difference. I hope you'll look upon me a little as a friend, too?"

"Oh, madam—Mrs. St. John—"

"And I hope things will all come right," Cecilia went on gently. "Perhaps Mr. Simpson will go back to the shop, after all—or at any rate realize how good you are. You mustn't be hard on him. Perhaps you didn't humor him quite enough. As you say—men and women like to be appreciated. That's something we—we all lose sight of sometimes."

"Yes," said Miss Jones earnestly.

"And don't be hard on Mr. Simpson's fine lady, will you? Fine ladies make mistakes but they mean well—sometimes—"

"Indeed, I won't. If she's like you, so beautiful and kind—I'd understand—"

"Thank you," said Mrs. St. John very sweetly.

When Heathcote made his appearance ten minutes later she was alone, busy picking up the fragments of the wrecked shepherdess. She did not look up as he entered so that he could not see that she was smiling.

"Miss Jones has just gone," she said. "We both felt that an interview *á trois* would be too trying. What a coincidence, though, isn't it?"

"I hope you didn't think—" Heathcote began heatedly.

"No, I assure you, I didn't. Whatever else I think of you I exonerate you from all cunning." She glanced at him out of the corners of her eyes. "I feel I owe you an apology, Heathcote."

"What on earth for?"

"For my remarks. You were perfectly right in smashing the shepherdess. But you must admit you were rather—how shall I say—suspicious. Heathcote, do you really think Miss Jones beautiful?"

No answer.

"Or were you trying to make me jealous?"

St. John gave a short uncomfortable laugh.

"I'm a pretty big fool," he said, "but I'm not such a fool as that."

"No? Perhaps—" She broke off hastily. "At any rate, Miss Jones had what the Americans would call a great little talk. I learned quite a lot of interesting things about you, Heathcote. For instance, I liked that bit about your setting a rascally

uncle on his legs again. Do you know, I never saw the affair in that light before, and I'm sure Uncle Jeremy will feel very consoled when he knows."

"Cecilia, don't jeer—"

"I'm not jeering. I'm deadly serious. Positively, I had tears in my eyes when I heard how you went from music-hall to music-hall and brought joy into the lives of plain ballet-girls—after a hard day's work, too!"

She waited expectantly. A sullen silence.

"Altogether, I judged from Miss Jones' tone that you were not very happy. yourself—no monetary troubles, of course, but troubles of the soul. She was so emphatic about your virtues, Heathcote, that I'm sure lack of appreciation on the family hearth was one of the griefs. Miss Jones appreciates you, doesn't she?"

A door creaked. Mrs. St. John gathered up the last fragment. "Seriously, dear, I apologize. I'll even confess something to you—I'm awfully sorry—and perhaps I was a little jealous—as to Mr. Simpson, you extraordinary duffer—"

She glanced back over her shoulder.

Heathcote St. John had vanished.

CHAPTER XVI

AS TRUE AS GOSPEL

THERE was only one place in number — Portman Square which Messrs. Greene and Greene and the furniture van emissaries had spared—possibly out of respect; the servants' hall, under the command of the butler, retained its usual aspect of severe comfort, to which was added a touch of genteel idleness. Obviously work belonged to the past. The buttons sat with his close-shorn head buried in the *Daring Deeds of Dandy Dick;* the housemaid had left Sir Richard and his lady-love for the adventures of a belted earl and a lovely village maiden; the cook forgot her menus in close and intimate conversation with the butler, in which a bank-book played a considerable part, and the footman never ceased for a moment to look handsome. Only one person was ever busy, and that was Tilda the scullery maid, an untidy, scrubby, small person who was generally supposed to undertake any odd job beneath the dignity of the select—and these odd jobs were remarkable for their number. When one is select there are necessarily so many things beneath one's dignity. On the particular afternoon

on which Mrs. Smythe made her state call Tilda was engaged in mending the housemaid's apron, and as this might be called a peculiarly odd job she had been allowed to sit with her superiors and enjoy the luxury of their conversation. It happened that the footman had broken his usual reserve silence, and as may be supposed, the cause was one of first-rate importance and interest. He was not a man to waste his breath, as they all knew well.

"I simply can't believe it," the cook said, with her hands in her apron—a habit acquired in less superior days. "A nice little boy like that, too."

Tilda pricked up her ears. It is to be admitted regretfully that she did not very often listen to what was going on about her, being slow of wit—a "natural," as the housemaid told her on various occasions—but the mention of the "nice little boy" made her look up. She had large round eyes, and a mouth with a tendency to gape—characteristics which were very marked at this particular moment.

"It's as true as the gospel," said the footman emphatically. "I tell you—I heard it with my own ears. Five thousand pounds a year—that's what they get, and Mrs. Deschesney, she gets the boy. A nice bargain, I must say, and—" He was interrupted by a low but piercing wail from the scullery maid. She had dropped the apron, heedless of Susan's indignation, and large tears of horror and grief stood in the pale eyes. "Oh, Mr. Adams, don't you go and say for they've gone and give

away Master Archibald!" she stopped. "It'll break 'is little 'eart, it will, I knows it will!" The footman put his hands to his ears to shut out the scullery maid's grammar, and the housemaid laughed.

"You get along and mind your own business, Tilda," said the cook sharply. "It don't matter to you whether Master Archibald breaks his heart or not. You'd better think of your own breakages—they're bad enough, goodness knows. There's the soup tureen last week, and the plate yesterday, and it's all coming out of your wages if I have a word to say in the matter. There, the front door-bell rung again. Don't you bother, Mr. Adams, Tilda will go—it's only one of them furniture men—do go on with your story!"

The footman crossed his hands behind his back preparatory to continuing, and reluctantly Tilda rose to obey orders. From behind the door she heard the great man express his opinion "that as long as Mr. St. John lived as a gentleman should, he wouldn't mind staying in his service, but that on principle he refused to have anything to do with paupers and such like folk in reduced circumstances." Then a second peal at the front door sent the listener sniffing and shuffling up the stairs. Fortunately the visitor was not a person of importance. As Mr. Samuels, of Greene and Greene, loomed up before her dulled vision Tilda drew a sigh of relief. She had a liking for Mr. Samuels and she accredited him with what she called "a

good 'eart," so that a faint watery smile struggled with the lugubrious tears which trickled down her cheeks.

"I just come in to speak to Mr. St. John about the china," the auctioneer's man said, as he hung up his hat on the van. "Now then, my dear, what's the matter with you? 'Pon my word, I believe the girl is crying her pretty eyes out!"

But this subtle flattery failed, and Tilda, on whose disposition a "good 'eart" always had a softening affect, burst out into a long suppressed snort of despair and grief. The sound roused Baby Archibald from profound slumbers behind the packing case. He had been playing hide-and-seek with himself and the various boxes and odd pieces of furniture which littered the hall, and in the natural course of events had fallen asleep. He sat up now and rubbed his eyes. From his point of vantage he could see and not be seen, but for the first moment he was too drowsy to notice anything. Then the scullery maid and the auctioneer's man heard a strange sound—something which sounded not unlike "Goblin!"

"'Tain't nothing!" said Tilda, drying her eyes with the corner of her apron. "It's that there furniture thing, which is allus creaking to itself."

"Well, and even if it does, that doesn't explain what you're crying about."

Tilda sniffed.

"It's Master Archibald," she said gaspingly. "The sweetest little boy that was ever borned—"

"But that's nothing to cry about either."

The sniff developed to a second snort. "They're goin' to sell him!" Tilda burst out in a flood of unusual coherency. "It's a real downright sell—five thousand pounds a year—for the sweetest little boy that was ever borned—to that stiff-necked Mrs. Deschesney, which looks as though she had swallowed a poker for her breakfast every day these ten years. And me that fond of 'im, too! 'E's the only Christian in the 'ouse, 'e is."

Mr. Samuels leaned his portly frame against the wall.

"You mean—" He began slowly and emphatically, as though recovering from an unbelievable shock—"You mean that they are going to give him to that woman?"

"That woman," echoed Tilda. "Wot d'yer mean?"

Mr. Samuels scratched his head dubiously and mysteriously.

"I'm not saying anything," he said, "but Mr. St. John ought to know what he's doing. It isn't safe to give a young child like that into the hands of a woman who does not know anything about such little creatures. I've heard tales"—he twisted his mouth horribly—"that would make your blood turn cold. One woman I knew—a very nice lady, by the way—adopted a little boy just like that, and she gave him rhubarb pills every morning for breakfast and codliver oil for lunch and licorice for supper, and at the end of a year that little boy died!"

Tilda had stopped crying. Her eyes were wide open with horror.

"Lor'!" she said.

Mr. Samuels nodded.

"Died!" he reiterated. "Died like a doornail. Somebody ought to tell Mr. St. John."

"'Tain't no good. Mr. St. John, 'e never bothers about Master Archibald."

"Well, Mrs. St. John then!"

"She!" Tilda's tone was one of condensed scorn and bitterness. "She don't think of nothing but 'er clothes and 'er jools. She don't care wot becomes of 'im. And besides, it's as much as my place is worth—though that ain't saying much."

"Somebody ought to do something," Mr. Samuels answered firmly. "A nice little boy like that!"

"The nice little boy" heard no more. With a caution and a dexterity learned in many blood-curdling bear hunts, he crawled out from behind the packing case and up the stairs which led to his mother's boudoir. The whole thing was a wonderful feat of self-control, for the tears were rolling pell-mell down his cheeks, and when he cried he usually cried audibly. But when he reached the corridor he forgot all caution and took to his heels and fled in a kind of piteous childish panic. It was the pitter-patter of his small feet which startled Mrs. St. John from her laborious but congenial task of rearranging the invitations for the twenty-second.

Then there was a letter from the musician which caused her considerable trouble. It was a nervous excited epistle with flashes of businesslike appreciation for details which reminded her vaguely of the grocery stores. For an hour Mrs. St. John had pondered it and this in itself was something unusual, for she was not given to pondering. She had even begun to accuse herself of nerves. Whence came this unnatural sense of responsibility? It had first made its appearance on the afternoon of Adelaide Deschesney's great offer. In fact, just when matters were beginning to right themselves she had begun to feel uncomfortable and the feeling had reached its climax with Miss Elizabeth Jones' advent. What did Mrs. St. John care about Miss Jones or Mr. Simpson or indeed anything? Nothing. And yet supposing the concert failed—? Mr. Simpson wrote that the seats were selling badly, and there was a faint note of reproach to be discovered between the lines which Mrs. St. John resented. She had done her best. She had bullied and cajoled her whole circle into attendance and had bestowed tickets—which she bought secretly—with a reckless prodigality. But somehow—she could not recognize the fact that her once all powerful influence was on the wane. She was leaving London under the shadow of suspicion; nobody had anything more to expect from her. The honor of having been invited to functions described at length in

the fashion papers was no more and Mrs. St. John realized that she was dying socially of a galloping decline.

Curiously enough she minded less than she had expected. If only she could have rid herself of this unpleasant burden of responsibility! It was tiresome, ridiculous, anything you liked, but there it was. Supposing the concert failed? Supposing courage and pertinacity were not always synonymous with genius? Supposing she had broken Mr. Simpson's heart, not to mention the heart of Mrs. Simpson the might-have-been? And then there was Heathcote slinking about on charitable errands with probably no better luck than herself. What a feckless useless couple they were! She was thinking how fortunate it was that at least Baby Archibald had been saved from their tender mercies and would be happy in better hands when—

She looked up with a slight frown on her pretty brows, and saw her small son standing in the doorway, his face tear-stained, his lips quivering. A sudden color rushed to her cheeks.

"Well, baby?" she said, with a strange unusual tenderness. The sound broke the momentary paralysis which his awe of her imposed upon him. He flung himself into her arms in a passion of grief and fear.

"Oh, mother, mother, it isn't true—it isn't true what the goblin said?" She held him close to her,

moved by an emotion so new to her that she did not in the first moment recognize it for what it was.

"Baby, what goblin—I don't understand?" He looked at her with wide-open, remorse-filled eyes.

"I didn't say 'goblin,' did I? I didn't mean to, please, you didn't hear, did you?"

Entirely puzzled, but obeying the behests of a belated instinct, Mrs. St. John shook her head.

"No, if you don't want me to, I didn't. But what is the matter—why were you crying?" Instantly he remembered his personal sorrow, and his small face began to pucker miserably.

"Tilda—Tilda said you were going to sell me," he sobbed, "and that you didn't care for anything but—but jools—and that you wouldn't care if I died of—codliver oil—and—and lickous—" The last part of the heart-breaking recital was lost on Mrs. St. John; the first part had stung too sharply. She held Baby Archibald closer to her, closer to her than she had ever held him in her life, and the warmth of the small shaking body seemed to penetrate to her heart and melt something there which had been vaguely hurting, a kind of frozen weight.

"It isn't true, is it, mummy; it isn't true?" he pleaded, panic-stricken by her silence. She looked at him seeking time.

"Would you mind—if you went away from me—for a long time?" she asked confusedly.

"I think—" he had grown suddenly quiet and

grave like a little old man. "I think—it would hurt here—terrible." And he rubbed himself meditatively in the region which has been gracefully described as the "lower chest."

Mrs. St. John did not laugh. She sat there gazing at him with doubt and wonder in her eyes.

"Baby," she said seriously, "you mustn't be foolish. If you stayed with me you'd have to go without all sorts of things that you like. There'd be no nice toys and nice big rooms and pretty furniture. You'd have to give up your bear and the beautiful steam railway and you'd have no kind nurse—"

"I hate nurse!" with passionate conviction.

"Archibald!"

"And I hate the bear—and the railway—and—everything. I just want you, mother."

He clung to her and suddenly she found to her amazement that she was clinging to him. For a moment she did not speak. She was conscious that her heart was beating faster with a kind of fear. She did not at first understand and then she knew that she was afraid to believe. It seemed so impossible, so ridiculously impossible. She was accustomed to people saying things and not meaning them. For one moment, in her distorted judgment, she doubted a five-year-old child's word.

"Baby," she said a little roughly, "you are just imagining things, you know. You really wouldn't mind if you went away. Why, you hardly ever see me as it is. Now, do you?"

"But I do see you," he persisted desperately. "I think all day of seeing you. When you doesn't come I cries. It's so all alone without you."

"Why?"

"'Spect 'cause I loves you."

"Why should you?"

"'Spect 'cause you's you," with a miserable sniff.

Mrs. St. John sat very still.

"Would you really care, baby?" she asked. He made no answer, but cuddled up closer to her with his head under her arm and for a moment neither spoke. Then he wriggled himself free and looked up at her again.

"It isn't true, mummy, is it?" he reiterated piteously.

She shook her head.

"Hush! You must be very quiet for a minute. I want to think. Stay there, baby." She pushed the invitations to one side and with her hand supporting her chin, stared blankly out of the window. The other hand held Baby Archibald's. He had curled up obediently at her feet and presently the smothered sobs died away into short-drawn sighs of exhaustion. Mrs. St. John listened. And as she listened a gradual change came over her face. Wonder, doubt and a dawning understanding gave way at last to a look of desperate resolution, and the next instant she had rung the electric bell on her table. It happened that it was Tilda who answered the summons. She was passing the door at that particular moment, and knowing that in these degen-

erate days the bell probably meant an "odd job," she put in her scarlet unhappy face. Then as she saw Mrs. St. John and the queer-shaped little bundle at her feet her mouth and eyes opened to their full extent.

"Lor'!" she said under her breath.

Mrs. St. John looked up and an expression of relief passed over her face.

"Go and get Master Archibald's trunk down from the attic," she ordered briefly. "And put out all the things he will need for a journey. Do you understand?"

"Y-e-s, mum."

"And send Susan to me."

"Yes."

"And if you are asked any questions by anybody, you are not to answer them. Do you understand?"

"Y-e-s, mum."

"That will do. You can go."

Tilda gasped and went. Mrs. St. John pushed the invitations into the waste-paper basket and began to write in feverish haste. Baby Archibald slumbered peacefully.

CHAPTER XVII

TRYING HIS HAND

ON her way down-stairs Tilda encountered the footman. He held a letter in his hand which he was considering on all sides with supercilious interest.

"From Mrs. Deschesney for the master," he said, "and there's a man waiting for an answer. Here, as you're going up-stairs, you'd better take it along up." Obviously Mr. Adams suffered from absent-mindedness, otherwise he would have seen that Tilda's destination was the kitchen, but she was not in a state of mind to argue the point with him, and she turned and plodded back the way she had come.

"The missus wants Susan," she said over her shoulder, "and Master Archibald's trunk is to be took down from the attic, hat once." The footman whistled.

"What's that for, anyhow?" he asked.

"'Tain't your business!" Tilda retorted, mindful of orders.

Mr. Adams was so taken aback that it was a full minute before he found a proper expression for his indignation, and by that time Tilda was out of

hearing. She found her master in his sitting-room, apparently reading the newspaper, but as he was holding it upside down it could scarcely have been of absorbing interest. He started up as she entered. Not even the monocle could disguise the fact that his attire was unusually negligent and that he looked tired and harassed.

"Well, what is it?" he asked.

"A letter for you, sir. A man is waiting for the answer."

Standing first on one leg and then on the other, Tilda waited while Mr. St. John ran over the contents of the message. Her mouth opened and shut at regular intervals, but no sound came forth, and only when he crushed the paper together and threw it into the fire she gave vent to her habitual gasp.

"Go down and tell your mistress that Mrs. Deschesney is coming for Master Archibald this evening," he said. "I—I should like to speak with her at once."

Tilda did not move. Her mouth was now open and apparently fixed, her eyes gaped in a ludicrous mixture of fear and determination.

"Be quick!" Heathcote St. John exclaimed emphatically. "Why, what's the matter with the girl?" For Tilda's features were undergoing the most hideous contortions, and at last, as though overcoming some terrific obstacle, a flood of outrageous English burst from her shaking lips.

"Please, master, don't you go for to do it—don't yer—though it's much as my place's worth—don't you go for to do it—it'll break 'is little 'eart, it will, and she'd kill 'im on rhu-u-barb and cod-cod——"

"She's mad!" St. John burst in, with his hand on the bell.

"Mathilda, calm yourself, for mercy's sake, and tell me what's wrong with you."

"'Tain't me," said Tilda, mopping her eyes with the corner of her apron. "It's Master Archibald wot I'm worriting about. I know it'll break 'is 'eart—I know it." And this time St. John grasped her meaning. He coughed, frowned and readjusted his eye-glass.

"Mathilda, you are a silly girl, and a very interfering one," he said. "You should learn not to mix yourself in other people's affairs. I—er—am compelled to travel, and during that time—er—Mrs. Deschesney—will take care of Master Archibald. There is no need for this commotion—no need at all. It's all for his good." In his uneasiness he had grown pompous and his pomposity seemed to goad the daring Tilda to frenzy.

"All for 'is good, indeed! What do you think 'e'd care for money and fine clothes if 'e ain't got 'is own father and mother—'im wot loves you so," she snorted. "You'd sell 'im—yes, sell your own flesh and blood for dirty money. You ain't fit to 'ave a little hangel like that. If I was you, I'd work

my fingers to the bone 'fore I'd play 'im such a low mean trick—I'd——"

"You can go!" said St. John, furiously calm.

"I'm a-goin', thank you!" retorted the enraged Tilda. "This 'ere is a free country, and I've said my say. I'm poor, but I'm honest, and I'm glad to shake off the dust of this 'ere 'ouse off my feet, I am!" She suited the action to the word, and St. John was left staring blankly at the door, red in the face, but not now with anger. He had been compelled to face things as they really were, not as he had chosen to see them, and the effect was instantaneous—the more so because his silenced conscience rose up to add its testimony against him. What, as the scullery maid had said, did money and luxury matter to a baby who preferred a rag dog and imaginary bears to the grandest toys? It was all a poor excuse to save themselves, to keep themselves from trouble and poverty. They were cowards hiding behind a child. But his wife? She would never consent—never let go her hold on the rescuing hand which had been held out to her. She would never be able to bear the struggle. She was not made to fight—or to love. And then he was conscious of a strange mingled feeling of tenderness and bitterness. She was so fair and young, so lovable—but she had never learned to love, perhaps could never learn. And if he asked such a sacrifice of her, would she ever forgive him? He

shook his head as if answering his own question, and in the same moment the door opened again and Mrs. Deschesney stood on the threshold. She was looking unusually elegant and determined—unusually stiff, too, and uncompromising. St. John straightened his shoulders.

"I've come," she said abruptly. "Where's Archibald?"

"I don't know," said St. John equally abruptly. Unconsciously he was beginning to look upon her as a sort of witch in modern garb, and his manner was not cordial.

Mrs. Deschesney glanced round the devastated apartment with raised eyebrows.

"You do seem to be in a pickle," she observed caustically. "I suppose the furniture people are having exactly their own way with you. By the way, I met that Samuels on the stairs. What on earth is he?"

"Auctioneer's agent," said Heathcote. "He's cataloguing and valuing things. We're making a clean sweep, you know."

"Well, I should scarcely call this a clean sweep. At any rate, I should keep my eye on that Samuels. My impression is that he is a noodle and doesn't know Sèvres from kitchen china. It's your business, of course, but you might as well get your money's worth."

"I shall do my best," said Heathcote stiffly.

"You've heard nothing from Jer—your uncle, I suppose?"

"Not a line. He may have drowned himself for all we know. His bankers told me the failure was very sudden—some rotten mine or other you know. I expect he's ashamed to show his face."

"I dare say. Well, it's a good thing you're safely landed. I wonder what you would have done if you hadn't a son to back you up, Heathcote. I expect somebody would have made you a motor agent or something easy like that."

Heathcote blushed.

"To tell you the truth, I did try my hand," he said awkwardly. "Smythe put me up to it. He was rather decent—the only one who was, in fact. I was agent for the Brenlike Motor Company for exactly twenty-four hours. Then I chucked it."

"Got tired, I suppose."

"Well—er—no, not exactly. To tell you the truth, I didn't think much of the car myself. It jibbed at hills and that sort of thing and there was a fellow who wanted to buy it and—and I told him. The deal didn't come off and the manager of Brenlike's seemed to think I wasn't quite up to my job and I didn't think so myself—so I chucked it."

Mrs. Deschesney laughed.

"My poor Heathcote! What an illuminating incident! I'm afraid your business acumen is inclined to forsake you at critical moments, though I must say when you have something worth offering you

can make an excellent deal. Which proves, I suppose, that you are merely honest. Now, don't glare at me like that! I'm not trying to annoy you, but I refuse to be sentimental or look at matters from any other than a business point of view. Well, let's change the subject. How is Cecilia's protégé getting on?"

Heathcote turned away and stared into the empty fireplace.

"Oh, all right, I suppose," he said indistinctly.

"I was wondering. Cecilia in the role of art patron is something new, isn't it? Of course women have a weakness for genius, and if Mr. Simpson was a genius I should understand, but really he isn't. He plays the piano worse than any Englishman I ever heard, and I only engaged him because I knew that at a musical soirée it didn't really matter, and it gave him food for a week. I never dreamed he could impose on anybody but himself. That concert is going to be a fiasco, Heathcote. You ought to put a stop to it."

Heathcote kept his face obstinately averted, but his shoulders straightened.

"I can't," he said roughly. "I can't interfere."

"Why on earth not? You're Cecilia's husband."

He turned at that.

"I'm not," he said. "At least not practically. Cecilia and I did not marry on the ordinary terms. We married on our own and our own did not include interference. We each go our own way."

"But——" She stopped short and smiled grimly. "I don't seem very fortunate in my choice of conversational subjects. Do I? Let's get on to the chief business. I've come for Baby Archibald, because in the present state of things I'm convinced he is being horribly neglected. I did not suppose you would mind—on the contrary, you will be glad to have him off your hands."

St. John winced.

"Er—yes," he said, "that is——" He lifted his head and faced her with a new expression on his face. "I am not in the least glad!" he said slowly and distinctly. "The more I think about it, the less I like it. After all, he is our own son—our son, and we have not the right to sell him. I tell you if it was not for my wife——"

"You would refuse to part with him," Mrs. Deschesney finished ironically. "How convenient it is to have a wife!"

St. John said nothing for a moment, and the two looked at each other in hot defiance. Then St. John adjusted his eye-glass.

"You can jeer at me as much as you like," he said. "My hands are tied by a promise to my wife. All I brought into our bargain was money—freedom, and she must have both, otherwise I would act differently. Archibald will be here in a minute."

He rang the bell and Mrs. Deschesney laughed.

"Heathcote, you ought to have gone on the

stage," she said good-humoredly. "As the heavy father you would reduce the gallery to floods. Now, what part is Cecilia going to play, I wonder!"

St. John winced again, but he was given no opportunity to retort, for the door opened and the footman ushered in Mr. Samuels, of Greene and Greene. That gentleman was in a high state of fluster, and if anything he looked burlier and redder in the face than ever.

"Pray excuse this abrupt entry, Mr. St. John," he said apologetically, "but I was cataloguing some china in the drawing-room when I had the honor of meeting Mrs. St. John. She was just going out and asked me to give you this letter at once and in person."

St. John snatched the envelope from the unusual messenger, who meanwhile gave Mrs. Deschesney the benefit of a profound bow. Mrs. Deschesney ignored the civility. Her keen eyes were fixed on St. John's face, and saw there the strangest change from amazement to the wildest relief. The next moment he had thrust the letter into her hands.

"Read that," he said. "She's gone—with Baby Archibald—to her mother! She couldn't part with him, after all—not for all the wealth in Europe—not even for my sake, and she bolted with him—there, listen!" He rushed to the window. The four-wheeler had just driven off. "By jove—she's a woman, every bit of her, after all."

"Go after her!"

"I shall do nothing of the sort!"

"Then the five thousand pounds is off," said Mrs. Deschesney hotly.

"And I don't care a hang!" was the rude answer. "I don't care a hang!—I'm infernally glad—I——"

"Heathcote, don't use worse language than you can help." Mrs. Deschesney rose with dignity. "And if your wife gets tired of milking cows, my offer still holds good. Good-by!"

St. John was still staring rapturously out of the window, and did not even answer. Mr. Samuels, of Greene and Greene, opened the door wide.

"I've just got my frock coat out of pawn," he whispered as Mrs. Deschesney sailed past him. "I'll be round to-morrow afternoon."

Mrs. Deschesney deigned no answer.

CHAPTER XVIII

SOMETHING SNAPS

THE concert agent shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, I can't help it, can I? Everything's been done that could be done. We've had sandwich men down Regent Street for a week and notices in all the papers. It's no good, Mr. Simpson, and I told you it was no good at the beginning. 'Simpson' never could and never will catch on. Now, 'Simplonski' or something like that might fetch 'em——"

"'A rose by any other name would smell as sweet'——" the musician began.

"Well, I don't know what fellow said that, but I'll lay you ten to one he wasn't an Englishman."

"It was Shakespeare——"

"That's what I'm saying, isn't it? Shakespeare was a genius. Besides, who's to know you're a rose, Mr. Simpson? You might be a Spanish onion with a name like that."

The musician sighed.

"Perhaps they'll go with a rush at the end," he said bravely.

"I dare say, they will," the agent agreed with emphatic significance.

The musician lifted his hat absently to no one in particular—for the agent's attention had already shifted—and stepped out into the street. The afternoon sun blazed down from a cloudless sky and a suffocating heat, bearing an unpleasant scent of asphalt, beat back from the pavements. The musician felt very tired. He tried to imagine what the Queen's Hall looks like when it is only a quarter full—or, as an alternative, pictured streams of anxious ticket buyers fighting one another at the last moment before the booking office. But somehow the latter vision did not inspire him as it once had done. He did not carry his head quite so high nor was his step so light and elastic with hope. He was, of course, only tired. The artistic temperament is given to excesses of emotion and fits of leaden despair. Not that the musician felt despairing. He had the world before him and it needed only an hour—one little hour—to transform Harold Simpson from Nobody into Somebody. It was ridiculous to doubt—still worse to be afraid. But at the bottom of his heart there was a sinking fear, a sick-faced doubt.

Instinctively he turned his steps in the direction of Portman Square. He had had no answer to his last letter, and perhaps Mrs. St. John had news for him. It was just possible that one of her big friends was going to take a few hundred seats for her friends, or perhaps a lot of great musical folk had

been persuaded to shine on the newly arisen star with their light. Mr. Simpson's dull eyes brightened. He thought how lovely a certain lady would look that night. He saw her in all her jewels in the very front row, a resplendent fairy vision watching him, listening to him with bated breath. And he would play to her and to her alone. He would lay all the richness of his soul before her, in homage; he would give her the greatest gift an artist can give—his art. It would be the token of his gratitude, his admiration, his—— He left the last word unthought. It seemed almost sacrilegious. Yet a musician must love where he must. After all, it was the highest, the most selfless love, and she had said "art ennobles everything." She who understood the wordless thoughts in his music would understand that, too.

It was with something of his old buoyancy that he mounted the steps of number — Portman Square and rang the bell. He had been too self-absorbed to notice any exterior alteration. It affected him unpleasantly to find Adams in a lounge suit of exquisite cut and the hall naked and unadorned.

"Mrs. St. John?" the musician queried rather blankly.

"Mrs. St. John has gone," said Adams with extreme frigidity. He said "gone," not "away," because "gone" vaguely suggested a lack of respectability, and Adams was of the opinion that Mrs. St. John's departure had not been respectable. He had,

indeed, dropped dark hints on the subject in the servants' hall, and was somewhat surprised to find the suspected musician standing on the door-step.

"Gone!" Mr. Simpson echoed stupidly. "Gone where?"

"I don't know," said Adams. His tone expressed very clearly that it was perhaps better for a man of his moral and social standing not to know, and that anyhow he was tired of holding the door open.

"But she never told me!" said Mr. Simpson.

"That's queer, isn't it? Well, perhaps she'll write when she's got time. Good afternoon!"

The door was just closing when Heathcote St. John came out of the dining-room. He caught sight of the musician's face and made an imperative movement which even Adams did not feel inclined to ignore.

"It's—Mr. Simpson, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir—Mr. St. John."

"You came to see my wife, I suppose?"

"Yes—that is, I had hoped—I didn't know——"

"Come in—won't you?"

The musician followed obediently, leaving Adams sulky and contemptuous in the rear. "I'm sorry," said Heathcote. "We're rather upset, as you see, but I dare say you'll find a packing case to sit on."

There was an awkward pause in the conversation. In inviting Mr. Simpson to come in, Heathcote had obeyed an impulse. He had a kind of feeling that Cecilia would have wished him to do so, and Ce-

cilia's wishes were regarded now with something more than formal respect. Moreover, Mr. Simpson obviously knew nothing of Cecilia's movements, which made him a shade less objectionable in Heathcote's eyes. Nevertheless, it was clearly the visitor's business to explain his visit, and this Mr. Simpson appeared to find difficulty in doing. In truth, even for the most skilled diplomat, it would have been a difficult explanation, and Mr. Simpson, for all his training in the grocery department, had always found it impossible to describe a spade as an implement intended for agricultural purposes. But one clearly can not tell the husband of a lady that one has come to her for inspiration and sympathy and other intangible matters—least of all when the husband is an immaculate young man with tired blue eyes and an indescribable aloofness of manner.

"I oughtn't to have come in," the musician began clumsily. "I didn't know, you see—it was about my concert. Mrs. St. John was so kind as to help me."

"Yes, I understand so," Heathcote assented. "It's next week, isn't it?"

"Yes, to-night a week."

"I hope you'll have a packed hall, Mr. Simpson."

"Thank you, sir—Mr. St. John." He squeezed his soft hat in his gaunt hands. "I hope so, too, but of course I'm not well known yet and people run after big names, you know."

"I suppose so," said Heathcote. The conversa-

tion threatening to come to another full stop, he added pleasantly, "Mrs. St. John gave me to understand that a good deal depends on your concert. In the event of a big success I understand that we may congratulate you on your engagement."

"That's off," said Mr. Simpson. He spoke frankly and in this matter betrayed himself as the true scion of his class. The lower orders have this much in common with the highest, that they are reticent. The middle class—which, since it has apparently no self-acknowledged members, must be called the class of "the other people"—is unreserved to the point of loquaciousness. "It was off days ago," Mr. Simpson went on. "You see, sir, she wasn't made to be an artist's wife. She didn't believe in me. She wanted me to go into business—something in the retail line, you know, and when I wouldn't she got angry. I've always had the idea that some fine fellow turned her head. Women's heads get so easily turned, you know, sir."

"Yes—I—I suppose so," Heathcote agreed.

"It's their vanity," the musician went on gloomily. "'Vanity, thy name is woman'—as the great poet said."

"I thought he said 'frailty,'" Heathcote ventured.

"I dare say, Mr. St. John, and it's true either way. Frail and vain—that's a woman all over."

The musician sank into profound retrospection and this time Heathcote made no remark. He felt

somehow that Mr. Simpson was prejudiced. He had thought a good deal since Cecilia's departure and he was not quite so sure of his masculine statistics as he had been.

"I hope it will all come right in the end," he said lamely.

"Thank you." Mr. Simpson rose slowly from his packing case. "I'd hoped to see Mrs. St. John," he said. "I wanted to present her with a ticket for the concert."

"I'm sorry," was the grave answer. "I'm afraid Mrs. St. John won't be able to be present. She has gone—away."

"Away—for long?"

"I think so. You see, we've given up this house. We're going to travel for some months."

The musician looked up stupidly, the color ebbing from his thin cheeks.

"Months?"

"Yes. Didn't Mrs. St. John tell you?"

Mr. Simpson shook his head. He seemed to have lost all power of expression except that of blank reiteration.

"No, she didn't write to me, Mr. St. John."

"I expect she will write, then," said Mr. St. John with increasing good humor. "Or you can write to her. Here's her address on this card. She was busy, you know. This change in our plans was rather—er—unexpected. A matter of health——"

"Her health?"

"No, mine," this with some stiffness.

Mr. Simpson was silent. He was gazing round him, noting the dust-sheets flung over the gold brocaded furniture and the dismantled walls. It was all too like his hopes—a gray disorder, the dull day after a dream full of gold light and sunshine. The tears came to the musician's eyes.

"I had so much hoped she would be there," he said huskily. "It makes all the difference. We musicians——" He faltered. And suddenly Heathcote realized the tears. He turned away aghast, and his heart hardened against Cecilia. How heedlessly she had wrought this havoc in a man's life! There was something, after all, in that terrible feminine vanity which Mr. Simpson had so bitterly attacked. For the moment he almost overlooked his satisfaction that it was vanity and nothing more. The musician's grief moved him too deeply.

"I can't say how sorry I am," he said, clearing his throat. "I am sure my wife didn't realize what a disappointment it would be to you—you're not feeling faint, are you?"

"No, a little dizzy, that's all——"

Heathcote rang the bell wildly.

"Port—at once," he commanded as the indignant Adams made his appearance amid the packing cases.

"There isn't any, sir."

"Isn't any? 'Pon my word——" But Adams had already disappeared again. In these days he did not waste words on the so-called head of a tot-

tering state. Heathcote turned helplessly to his visitor. "You see how things are," he said.

"Yes, Mr. St. John, you are very kind. It was a moment's passing weakness." He drew himself up with a certain dignity. "I thank you."

"Don't mention it—eh——" with a rush of inspiration. "I tell you what—I'll come round to your concert."

Mr. Simpson turned wearily to the door.

"You are very kind," he repeated dully.

"And you mustn't take my wife's desertion to heart," Heathcote went on. "She'll be most awfully interested to hear all about you, I know she will. You see, she was altogether very upset." He was defending her desperately against his own accusations. The musician's dejected eyes smote him to the heart. He would have been a little less indignant if he had realized that Mr. Harold Simpson had not breakfasted. The two men shook hands solemnly.

"I thank you," the musician reiterated in his dull-lived way. He stumbled out into the street. He was feeling weak with hunger and the artificial prop of hope and enthusiasm had been roughly snatched from him. She had not even remembered! Was there no such thing as constancy on earth? He pondered bitterly as he crawled along the stifling streets homeward. What did it matter what happened to him? No one cared—not a soul. He tried to picture the gracious figures of the muses surrounding him with uplifting tender sympathy and

his feverish brain snatched at the fancy and made it almost real. That much was left him—his art, his music, for whose sake he was to suffer and conquer. A sudden blankness crept over his thoughts. He did not know quite what happened, but when the blankness cleared again he found himself leaning against the railings of an empty house. A familiar pair of anxious eyes gazed up into his.

"Har—Mr. Simpson, are you better?"

He recovered with an effort and passed his hand over a damp cold forehead. "It must have been the heat," he muttered vaguely. "I didn't see you."

"You were almost unconscious," she said. "I ran across the road. You're better now?"

"Much better. It was very good of you."

"Oh, not at all. I am glad—I was there."

The mist cleared. They looked into each other's eyes with an unconscious wistfulness. They had not seen each other since that brief stormy interview in Mrs. Belbury's hall and much had happened in the interval. Was it fancy or was she really paler and thinner; had he really been so gaunt and hollow as that?

"Won't you take my arm?" she said. "I'm sure you ought not to be alone. We can go down the back streets," she added humbly. "Nobody will see us—and if they do they will only think I am a servant—it won't matter."

He winced. Even now the thought of the apron hurt him.

"Shan't I be taking you out of your way?"

"Oh, no, this is my afternoon out, you know."

He accepted her arm, but he could not help feeling how tactless she was. At least she might have passed over the unpleasantness of her position in silence. She lacked fine feeling. Yet he felt unreasonably comforted. They walked in silence, she measuring her step carefully to his. They were not far from the Bloomsbury lodging-house and a long way from Mrs. Belbury's select establishment. But it did not occur to him then to ask what she was doing in that neighborhood. He asked her instead, somewhat stiffly, how she was getting on.

"Quite nicely," she answered in her gentle way. "It's rather hard work sometimes."

"I bet she runs you off your legs."

"Oh, no. There's a lot to do, of course, but that's not her fault."

"You're quite content with things?"

She smiled sadly.

"One has to be."

They had reached a murky-faced, four-storied building in a shabby square and both came to a standstill. The musician stared in front of him in embarrassed silence. The situation offended his sense of the conventions, which was perhaps too highly cultivated to be artistic. It savored of the counter, though this he did not realize. Suddenly he turned round and found her pale tired eyes fixed earnestly on his face.

"Harold—I'm glad we've met again," she said with a little rush. "I hated to think you were angry with me. You're not any more, are you?"

"Why should I be?"

"I don't know—of course it doesn't matter to you now what I do—but I didn't like to feel I'd—I'd—dragged you down—or hurt you. I'd like to feel that we are still friends, Harold."

He nodded.

"When you're famous—of course—it will be different. But it will be nice to think that I had known you—once."

"Elizabeth—the concert's on Tuesday."

"Oh, yes, I know."

"Would you—would you like to go?"

He felt the color rise to the roots of his hair. He had Mrs. St. John's "complimentary ticket" in his hand. What a bitter cruel irony it all was!

"I am going," said a small voice beside him.

He turned and stared down at her.

"*You* are going?"

"Why, of course. I bought my ticket yesterday—a two shilling one—here it is. And Mrs. Belbury has promised me an evening off."

"Elizabeth——"

There was the blinding mist again. It came with a rush and for a moment shut out the dirty square and the white, eager little face. "I—I meant to give you this," he stammered.

"Oh, no." She shook her head. "It's too fine for me, Harold. I couldn't sit there. I haven't got the clothes. But the music will sound grand away up there, and I shall be—be—sort of praying for you—for your luck—Harold."

He stretched out his hand blindly.

"Elizabeth—you're a good sort. I said a lot of hard things—that day—I didn't mean them."

"I know you didn't. I didn't mean mine either. When one's hurt one tries to hurt other people. But it's all right now, isn't it? We're friends again."

"Yes—of course, friends."

"Good-by, and you'll lie down and rest, Harold, won't you?"

"Yes—I promise."

He didn't quite know how he reached his attic. It seemed a long, long way up the narrow stairs, and there was an uncomfortable dryness in his throat which he could not master. But he pulled himself together as he opened the attic door. The figure of a short thick-set man rose from the one chair to greet him.

"Mr. Harold Simpson, isn't it?"

"Yes. But I don't quite understand——"

"That's all right, young man. Don't apologize. Your landlady bustled me up here and I've been glad of a rest after those stairs."

"I wasn't expecting visitors," the musician said coldly. "Won't you sit down?"

"Thanks, Mr. Simpson, I've come on business."

Mr. Simpson bowed. His heart had begun to beat faster. Like all people of artistic temperament he was superstitious and after bad luck comes the reaction. Not that the visitor was particularly promising in appearance. He was shabby and rather common-looking. But then it might be a concert agent—some one to fix up a tour of the provinces, for instance—or perhaps of America.

"I have a few minutes to spare," the musician said, looking for a watch that had never existed.

The visitor slapped open a shabby note-book.

"That's good. Well, to begin at the beginning. My name's Samuels, of Greene and Greene, auctioneers. I do a bit of business for them and a good deal for myself. Now, I've got a bit of money to invest, young man, and I'm no speculator. None of your banks and wildcat gold mines for me, sir. Well, I've set my eye on a little place down Putney way. There's a first-class opening down there for a first-class business in the grocery line. Now, I don't know lard from cream cheese by the look of the thing, and I want some one to take the job in hand. A friend of mine who keeps a store round Soho gave me your name as a likely chap——"

"Excuse me, Mr. Samuels——"

"Now don't you go and interrupt, young man. It's a good job I'm offering. Two hundred a year down certain, and twenty per cent. on the profits. How does that strike you, eh?"

The musician drew himself up. For one fleeting second he had caught a glimpse of a neat spick and span little grocery, the biscuit-tins piled up in the artistic design which had earned him fame in past days, himself in a white apron weighing the tea with a practised hand. The vision flashed away.

"Your offer sounds most attractive, Mr. Samuels," he said coldly. "But I am not in the business any more. I am a—professional musician."

"My word!" Mr. Samuels slapped his note-book to with a sigh of disgust. "That's a dry game, isn't it?"

"We musicians work for something better than money," was the proud answer.

"You won't think it over? Two hundred a year, young man——"

"It's impossible."

"Well, well, it's your affair of course. Personally"—he threw a supercilious glance at the piano—"I'd rather do with biscuit-tins than with musical boxes any day of the week. However, every man has his taste. I'll have to look elsewhere. So long."

"Good-by," said the musician with dignity.

He retained his upright attitude of aloofness until the visitor's steps had died away. Even then by sheer force of will he kept the vision of the grocery shop out of sight and with a firm step went over to the despised down-at-heels upright and struck what should have been a resounding and defiant chord.

But unfortunately the worn-out strings snapped.

And then something in the musician himself snapped also. He buried his face in his thin hands and wept helplessly.

CHAPTER XIX

BENEFITS FORGOTTEN

HEATHCOTE ST. JOHN had arrayed himself in his best morning suit and had been unusually fastidious as to the set of his collar and the color of his tie—facts which might have pointed to a festive occasion had they not been belied by the mingled depression and resolution expressed on his countenance. As a matter of fact, he was preparing himself to face the music, as he would have put it, and obeying by instinct the natural law by which it is ordained that a man in a well-cut coat is more likely to brazen matters out with success than a similarly situated individual in a shabby garment, he had given his morning toilet careful if unaided attention. Charles, his French valet, had gone. Indeed, everything seemed to have gone except himself. As he leisurely descended to the dining-room his eyes rested disconsolately on the bare walls and carpetless floors, and when he entered the once luxurious room he found nothing but a table and a few chairs—and no breakfast. He went to the fireplace and rang the bell with the diffident air of a man who does not expect to be answered. It seemed

almost as though the disappearance of the silver warming dishes had had a strong influence on his moral character, for his old manner of the spoiled-man-of-the-world was remarkable for its absence, and Tilda, who eventually answered the fourth summons, was greeted with a patience wholly different from the reception she had promised herself. In truth, her tardy arrival was due to the fact that she had stood for five minutes outside the door, shaking in every limb. Her daring performance a few days back had magnified itself in her easily-heated imagination to a heinous offense, and it was only the memory of Susan's comforting assurance, "Well, he can't eat you, anyway," which at length brought her over the threshold.

"Yes, sir," she said timidly.

Heathcote turned from his moody contemplation of the empty fireplace and adjusted his eye-glass.

"Oh, it's you," he said. "You seem to be running the house just now. The others are taking a rest cure, I presume? Well, never mind. Try to persuade the cook to give me a cup of tea, will you?"

Tilda stood uncertainly on one leg and then on the other. She was getting off lightly—apparently her sins were either forgiven or forgotten—but she was convinced that her next remark would call forth the dreaded storm.

"If you please, sir, cook isn't hup yet," she said with a small gasp, and then waited with chattering

teeth for what was to come. Heathcote merely gave vent to a grim chuckle.

"Of course she isn't—how thoughtless of me! On no account disturb her. All the same, I'm dying of thirst. What's to be done, eh?"

He looked at her with such an expression of woebegone appeal that Tilda's hopelessly inane gape gradually passed into a look of dawning intelligence. Her terror of her usually distant and unapproachable master was dying a natural death, and her mother-wit revived.

"If you please, sir, I could make hup the fire and bile the kettle in a jiffy—I knows 'ow to make a cup o' tea with the best of 'em," she said.

Heathcote smiled.

"That's right. Fire away, then. You're a magnificent woman—a regular *deux ex machina,* aren't you?"

"Yes, sir," said Tilda obediently and wondered if the new sobriquet had anything in common with the epithet usually showered upon her by her natural enemy, the cook. But apparently no harm was meant, and she busied herself with her preparations, appearing presently with a kitchen breakfast service and some rather greasy-looking toast.

During her absence St. John had seated himself at the table and drawn out a crumpled letter from his breast pocket. He was reading it as she entered, and was so absorbed that he forgot to thank her, and his thirst for tea seemed to have disap-

peared entirely. The former omission did not matter to Tilda, who was not accustomed to an overflow of gratitude, but the latter indifference hurt her. With one eye on her master and the neglected teacup she shuffled round the dismantled room making a considerable clatter in her impatience. But Heathcote did not hear her. For about the twentieth time he was reading the hastily scribbled letter that Mr. Samuels had brought him on the memorable day when his wife and Baby Archibald had taken to flight. It was a very disjointed, illogical little epistle, but it seemed to give the reader a peculiar satisfaction.

"I am very sorry, Heathcote," Mrs. St. John had written. "I know I am selfish, but I can't help it. I meant to go through with it for my own sake as well as for yours—I wanted the nice things of life just as much as you did, but somehow I can't pay the price. It's absurd—but I can't do without Baby Archibald, and I don't believe he can do without me. I have just found it all out, and I haven't the courage to tell you. So I'm going home, and I hope you will forgive me. I don't expect you to understand—I hardly understand myself—and you, being only a man, will only see that I have thrown away everything I used to care about. I don't know what is going to happen, but I know that I can't give up baby for all the wealth of the world."

"Only a man, indeed!" Heathcote St. John muttered indignantly as he refolded the letter, but there

was a curiously light-hearted twinkle in his eyes as he looked up and perceived Tilda standing with her arms akimbo, her cap over one ear, watching him. "Why, hello!" he exclaimed cheerily. "What's the matter now, my kindly ministering sprite?"

The ministering sprite wriggled nervously.

"If you please, your tea, sir!"

"Oh, yes, the tea, confound it! I had quite forgotten. H'm, excellent stuff! When I move to Park Lane you shall be head cook—I swear it by my ancestors if I have any worth swearing by. Now, finish your good offices and fetch up such of my retainers as by this time have left their slumbers. I have a word to say to them."

Tilda gave another of her characteristic gasps. The flow of words left her completely out of breath, but she had gathered enough to understand her mission, and went shuffling out of the room and downstairs. When she had gone, Heathcote crossed over to his writing-desk, unlocked a drawer and took out sundry little packages, which he laid out in order. The healthy color had gone out of his cheeks, and when he went back to the fireplace and began to fumble with his tie before the looking-glass it might have been noticed that his hand shook. The great ordeal for which he had been preparing gloomed imminent, and presently when some one knocked at the door he started nervously.

"Come in!"

He straightened up and attempted an air of ease.

The cook was the first to enter. Being a cook, she was at no time very civil, and in all her experience no one ever had the audacity to call her up at ten o'clock in the morning, so that her manner now was a fine mixture of hauteur and resentment. With her nose in the air and her plump arms folded over an ample waist, she gave Heathcote the benefit of a slight inclination of the head, and made way for the butler. Adams, the footman, ushered in Susan, the housemaid, and Augustus, the buttons, brought up the rear, and even the latter bore himself with an air of offended dignity.

"You wished to speak with us, I believe, sir?" the butler began with the faultless ease of his class.

Heathcote stemmed his shoulders firmly against the mantelpiece, as a man does who is making his last stand. If only the cook had not been there, things would have been better. There was something crushingly superior in her attitude which made him realize why he had paid her one hundred pounds a year for her services. He felt that she must have lowered herself on his account, and that she knew it.

"Yes—eh!—I wish to speak to you all," he said, plunging recklessly. "It is—eh—very good of you to come." The last observation was partly a sop to the cook, partly the result of a rising sense of humor. It was all so hopelessly funny. Even the butler, whom he had always looked on with the respect due to personified dignity, appeared comic

in the new light which his misfortunes threw on the scene. It was as though his own old rather pompous self stood up as a butt for the amusement of the new man, stripped of his pomp and reduced to the level of his fellows. "I hope I haven't disturbed you," he added with a grim enjoyment of the situation.

The butler's movement was sufficiently gracious, the cook remaining uncompromising; the footman's manner suggested "Please don't mention it," while Susan suppressed a giggle, and Augustus, being unrefined, grinned openly.

"I have not the least doubt that you know better than I do how things stand with me," Heathcote went on deliberately, and the twinkle in his eye brightened. "I hope you will excuse the circumstances that made it impossible for me to set you free from your services before the general collapse, and I greatly regret that you should have suffered any inconvenience—I—eh!—gave instructions that your quarters should be left untouched to the last, so I hope that your position was tolerable. To-day, however, I myself must quit, and consequently I should be grateful if you would accept the payment which you will find on the table and take your departure as soon as is convenient to you."

The butler and the cook exchanged glances. The cook coughed.

"Excuse me, sir, but considering the short notice we think that our month's wages——"

"I think, if you would be so good as to look, that you will find I have taken that grievance into consideration," Heathcote interrupted. "I'm sorry that I can not do more for you, but I haven't got any more for myself."

The cook looked shocked. Evidently such a horrid state of things seemed to her quite incompatible with respectability. She merely bobbed her head, however, and then with great dignity led the procession to the table where the various little envelopes awaited their claimants.

Heathcote watched the performance with amusement not wholly free from bitterness. Like most easy-going men, he was not given to counting his own acts of generosity, but he knew that he had been good to his people in his own way, and they were leaving him without thanks or a word of regret. Only the butler, gentlemanly to the last, said a gracious "Good day, sir," from the door, and then he heard their departing footsteps along the corridor, and the mysterious whisperings that presently died into silence. Heathcote shrugged his shoulders. He was annoyed with himself for allowing the pin-prick to hurt. After all, if a man's wife leaves him without regret, what can he expect of his butler?

"So much for the rats!" he said aloud in the bitterness of his soul. "Having saved themselves, the ship can now go down as fast as it likes, and—"

"If you please, sir," said a small voice very timidly at his elbow.

He started round. Tilda, twisting her envelope between her work-worn fingers, was gazing up at him with an expression of frightened resolution. Her ludicrous appearance was not modified by the fact that her round eyes were swimming in tears, but she was very much in earnest, and Heathcote was not in the mood to laugh at her.

"Well?" he said. "What's the matter? Isn't the amount right?"

"Oh, yes, thank you. If you please, sir, I don't want it."

"Eh?"

"I don't want it."

"Don't want what?"

"The money, sir."

Heathcote shook his head.

"My poor girl, what's your name?"

"Tilda, sir."

"Well, Tilda, I should consult a doctor at once. A person who doesn't want money must be mentally deranged."

"Please, sir, wot's that?"

"Wrong in the head."

"Oh, yes, I knows. Cook tells me that twenty times a day, so I 'spose it's true, but I knows wot I'm a-talkin' about now. If you ain't got nothink sir, I don't want nothink neither. That's flat."

"Oh, that's flat, is it?" A faint smile was dawning over Heathcote's face. "I see how it is, Tilda. You're a philanthropist, which is about the same thing as being wrong in the head, especially if you are poor. You're not a millionaire in disguise, are you, Tilda?"

"Me, sir? Lor', no! Father's a cab-driver. There ain't no millions to be 'ad in that there line with them taxis, sir."

"H'm." Heathcote seated himself and waved her to the only other chair of which the room boasted. "Sit down, Tilda! Yes, I mean it—sit down. I'm feeling rather lonely, and it appears that you are the only friend that I have left. All my other friends are out of town. Do you know what it means when one's friends are out of town in the season, Tilda?"

"No, sir."

"You're lucky. I've just found out. Now, sit down properly. Don't balance on the edge of the chair like that—it can't be comfortable."

"'Tain't right, sir."

"Oh, yes, it is, Tilda. We're both in the same box now. Wasn't it you who told me the other day that you were poor but honest? Well, that's my state now, only *I'm* not sure about being honest. At any rate, in spite of all your very excellent advice, I was ready to let my son go for the sake of the money-bags, while my wife did the only right thing there was to be done, and took him out of danger.

Which proves that she's worth half a dozen of me, doesn't it?"

Tilda put her disorderly-looking head on one side.

"Don't know, sir. We women is different. 'Tain't likely a man should understand——"

"Oh, look here—hang it all, Tilda, don't you start rubbing it in! I know I'm a mere man, but I suppose you will allow me to have some feelings?"

Tilda smiled vaguely. She was thinking of a picture she had seen of Mrs. St. John seated at her table with Baby Archibald asleep at her feet, and in her dim way she grew very wise.

"When a woman 'as a little hangel like that she's different—she gets extra feelin's," she explained. "Maybe she don't know 'erself that she's got 'em until the pinch comes."

Heathcote lay back in his chair. He was enjoying himself for the first time for many days.

"You're a philosopher as well as a philanthropist, Tilda," he said. "We shall have to lock you up. In the meanwhile, though, being a very ignorant and a very helpless member of the male species, I can not do better than seek your advice. Now, just try and imagine that I'm like any poor fellow you might chance to meet on the street without a friend or a penny-piece to bless himself with, and with a wife and child that can do very well without him. Have you got that far?"

"Do you mean a feller wot I knows?"

"Yes, a friend, if you like."

Tilda reflected for a moment.

"First I'd take 'im 'ome," she said slowly, "and mother 'ud give 'im a square meal and a shakedown in our spare room. Then we'd look out for a job for 'im."

"But, suppose he wasn't good for anything—had never done a stroke of work in his life?"

"Can't you do nothink, sir?" Tilda demanded with eyes wide with surprise. St. John thought a moment.

"I can play polo first-class, and am a fair hand at bridge. I can drive a coach as well as any man in England, and make a mess of my affairs generally. Not a very promising list of accomplishments for a man looking for a job, is it?"

"If you could drive a coach you could drive a cab, sir," Tilda said with a flash of inspiration.

St. John looked at her and then burst out laughing.

"'Pon my word! So I could," he said. "Perhaps we shall come to that yet. There! I heard the postman's knock. I'll run down and see if there are any letters. You stay there, Tilda, till I come back."

Tilda gazed after him open-mouthed as he ran lightly down the broad carpetless staircase. There was something fresh and almost boyish about him which was quite new to her—and, indeed, to Heathcote himself. Though despair and a curious ach-

ing loneliness gnawed away at a newly discovered region of his being, he felt freer and younger. The burden of boredom and weary indifference had been lifted from his shoulders. When a man has exactly twenty shillings between him and starvation it is rather difficult to be bored, and recent events had taught him that his indifference had been little more than an unconscious pose. Positively his heart beat faster as he fumbled with a refractory letter-box. Three letters fell out, and one he seized upon with a hungry eagerness, and tearing it open, began to read it then and there by the dim light that filtered through the hall window. The letter was from his wife. Like the note, it was jerky and abrupt—and several degrees colder.

"Dear Heathcote," she had written, "I do not know whether it will interest you very much, but I thought I ought to let you know that baby and I have arrived home safely. As I have not heard from you, I suppose that you are very angry. I am not going to make excuses for myself again. I do not in the least regret what I have done, and I am very happy to be here. But I am sorry for you. I suppose it was mean of me to leave you to face things out alone. I think everything has been a mistake from the beginning. We began at the wrong end of things. Neither of us had ever faced anything serious in our lives, and now we can't help either ourselves or each other. Only, I have the baby, and I shall never give him up. I hope there is no law to make me, because I shan't. Father

and mother say we can stay here until you have made some plan for yourself. Perhaps you can get some position where there is not much work to do —it must be dreadful for you. Please let me know what you arrange. There is only one other request I have to make. Will you please let Mr. Simpson know what has happened, and why I can not be present at his concert? It may help to disillusion him. Our attempts at philanthropy were about equally successful, were they not? I am sorry to have to ask you to do this, as I know you dislike Mr. Simpson—I can not think why. Personally, I don't know whether his music is good or bad, but he seems sincere and he worked and didn't mind suffering for what he loved. And that was why I liked him and tried to help him.

"Your wife,

"Cecilia."

And then at the very bottom of the letter, in large and most unsteady letters, he found a postscript.

"I am very wel. I hop you are very wel. I wish you were here. Do kom soon.—your loving Archibald."

There followed a large watery-looking blotch, which for more experienced eyes would have had a pathetic significance. But Heathcote was too stung to see clearly. The cold little letter, with its undercurrent of mockery and disparagement had cut him to the quick—perhaps because he knew that

it was justified. She treated him as a helpless drone, and something she had once said to him recurred to him now, lighted this time by a ray of understanding.

"If it were not for your money there would not be all this trouble—and besides, then I should not have married you——"

At the time he had regarded the remark as one of his wife's unsolvable paradoxes—now he understood. If he had worked like other men—even as this third-rate musician—had built a home for her with his own hands, she might have loved and respected him. Certain he was she wouldn't have left him now in the hour of his bitterest need.

With compressed lips he turned his attention to the other two letters. Both were from friends, wealthy business men whom he had welcomed constantly at his house. Both were extremely sorry, but they knew of nothing to suit him. If they heard of anything, they would let him know at once. Had he thought of trying the colonies, etc.?

He crushed the letters together in his hand and threw them into a far corner of the empty hall. They had all deserted him, and for the good and sufficient reason that the only virtue he had possessed—his wealth—had been taken from him. Was it indeed his only virtue? Had he nothing else to offer the world? With a movement that was new to him he threw back his head and squared his shoulders. At any rate he would beg no more,

either for help or pity. He would make his way alone, and if need be, from the very bottom of the ladder which a relentless fate was forcing him to climb. And perhaps one day—he could not form the hope that flashed through his mind—it was too vague, too intangible. He only knew that it was linked somehow with a smudged and most illiterate postscript. With a firm step he went back to the dining-room, where Tilda, from sheer force of habit, was flicking the dust from one place to another. She turned eagerly as he entered.

"Tilda," he said cheerily, "I've got just twenty shillings in the world. Do you think that you would keep me for a week in that shakedown you were telling me about?"

"Oh, sir!"

"Don't gasp like that. And look here, I've been thinking it over and that idea about driving a cab isn't bad. Tilda, in fact, it's a perfect inspiration. How do you think I'd look perched up on the box with my best topper on, and a sporting coat of the latest cut? Don't you think I'd take the shine out of some of those taxi villains?"

Tilda's eyes were now stretched to a degree that was positively alarming.

"If you please, sir—I didn't mean—you're a fine gent——"

"Am I really? Are you quite sure, Tilda? Do you know, I'm not, and I'm rather anxious to find out. And please don't call me 'sir' any more.

You're going to take me home—away from this abomination of desolation—give me a square meal and a job, do you hear? and we're going to be friends and give the taxis fits, aren't we, Tilda? Shake!"

He held out his hand—Tilda wiped hers on her apron, and they "shook" solemnly.

CHAPTER XX

HIS WEDDING GARMENT

ON one fine morning in June the inhabitants of Portman Square, had they been on the look-out, might have witnessed an unusual spectacle. A comparatively smart hansom cab drove up to the door of number — and the driver and the occupant carried on a lengthy conversation through the trap-door. The occupant—a somewhat untidy female with wisps of hair fluttering out from underneath an antiquated straw hat—descended, bearing in either hand a basket-work hand-bag. The driver thereupon whistled up an attentive crossing sweeper, threw him the reins with an injunction to keep a sharp eye on the savage beast, and clambered down cautiously to his fare's side. Both cast anxious glances at the neighboring windows, the cabby produced a latch-key and a minute later number — Portman Square had engulfed them.

"Whew!" said Heathcote. "I've never been so hot in my life."

"'Tis a bit 'ot, ain't it?" Tilda admitted cheerfully. "My word, you brought us along fine, sir."

"If you call me 'sir' again, Tilda, I'll upset you on the way home."

"Oh, very well, Mr. 'Eathcote. It sort o' comes out natural like. Now, wot are we goin' to do?"

"Pack my things. You've got to come and do a little selecting, Tilda. Look sharp! I'm not sure that I'm not trespassing."

They ascended the broad flights of stairs on tiptoe and with unconsciously bated breath. Heathcote's cab number jangled against his coat button and he hid it hastily out of sight. He felt out of place in this gaunt barren building. It was quite impossible to realize that only a short time before he had not only been very much "at home," but had regarded its magnificence with the contempt of familiarity. Now all that had changed. Gone were the graceful marble statuettes balancing on ebony pedestals; gone the rich, sound-hushing velvet carpets and the severe ancestors of Uncle Jeremy's choosing; gone, too, the delicate presence which had seemed so much part of it all—above all, gone Heathcote's easy conviction that all these things belonged to him by natural gift. Outside Cecilia's boudoir door he stopped and sighed deeply.

"There isn't anything quite so queer as life, Tilda," he said in hushed accents.

Tilda glanced at him and then at the door and formed her own conclusions.

"Don't you worrit, Mr. 'Eathcote—I'll bet she's thinking of you 'ard and wishin' she was with you."

"Do you think so? 'Pon my word, Tilda, I wasn't talking aloud, was I?"

"No, Mr. 'Eathcote. Leastways, I didn't hear you."

"Well, how did you guess what I was thinking about?"

"Dunno, sir—Mr. 'Eathcote."

"Sort of Cassandra, eh? Now, come along, here's my room. I wonder if I ought to knock?"

He entered diffidently. Here also was devastation—only the faded patches on the delicate wall-papers testified to the had-beens. And on the floor, half covered with dust-sheets, lay neat piles of masculine attire. "All that remains of the late lamented Heathcote St. John," said their owner solemnly and almost reverently. "I wonder how much Mr. Samuels is going to give for them?"

"All them clothes ain't yours, Mr. 'Eathcote?"

"Every man jack of them, Tilda. Takes your breath away, doesn't it? It does mine. There's two hundred pounds in that pile, young woman, and what wouldn't I do with two hundred pounds now?" He added the "now" with a melancholy emphasis, then shook himself as though to get rid of oppressive recollections. "Tilda, lend a hand. Here, five suits of evening clothes! Shall I want evening clothes, do you think?"

Tilda considered him gravely. It must be regretfully admitted that she scratched her head.

"Not unless you're thinking of going into the waiter business, Mr. 'Eathcote."

"I'm not, Tilda. To this day I don't know which

side one hands the vegetables, and I'd rather tackle a runaway cab horse than a blanc-mange. They can go. Here—three golf suits—one worn. Might keep that. Four riding costumes. Bit too smart for the Mews, eh? Still, they'll soon tone down. Keep one. Six morning suits. No good for anything I can think of. Five cutaways. Tilda, what an exquisite young man the late departed must have been! Hello, here's an old-fashioned bit of goods—and not much worn, either—I wonder what the devil——" He was kneeling on the dusty floor tossing one elegant article after the other at the gasping Tilda, who was too busy refolding to pay much attention to his comments. He looked back at her and then at the black coat in his hand. "Tilda, come here a moment!"

"Yes, sir."

"Tilda, I—I was married in that."

"Lor', sir!"

"Yes—or rather the late departed was. I'll wager I wasn't. Queer thing—I'd like to be married."

This went beyond his listener's comprehension.

"You ain't a-goin' to sell that, sir?"

"No, I don't think I shall. It might come in useful—in case one day—a far-off day—I really am married." He folded the coat himself and laid it carefully on one side. "What have we here? Twenty silk sleeping suits. I should say ten would do."

"Lor', five, Mr. 'Eathcote."

"Very well, five, then. Forty shirts. Keep twenty—yes, I shall keep twenty, Tilda. And heaven knows how many collars! And look at these silk socks—" He looked at her appealingly. "I suppose silken hose would be a bit out of place, eh?"

"All wool 's better, Mr. 'Eathcote."

"I dare say. I dare say I shall be craving for all wool one of these days. Very well—there they go." He sighed regretfully. "Now for the things we do not talk about—"

"If it is them there pants you mean, Mr. 'Eathcote—"

"Hush, Tilda! And before Mr. Samuels, too!"

Tilda as usual gasped, and turning, perceived that the door had opened. Mr. Samuels stood on the threshold. His check suit, in the full light of the day, seemed unusually disturbing in pattern and was rendered the more vivid by a red tie. His face was a shade redder, his eyes a shade bluer by contrast and peculiarly alert-looking.

"Good morning, sir."

Heathcote rose and dusted the knees of his trousers.

"Morning. Come to take possession, I suppose?"

"That's so, sir. The decorators for the new owners are coming in this afternoon."

"The owners? Who may they be?"

Mr. Samuels pursed his mouth and put his head mysteriously on one side.

"A married couple, sir—leastways they are going to be married. Middle-aged, too. I'm running the job for them."

"I see. You're a man of all trades, Mr. Samuels. Well, perhaps you'll just run your eyes over these articles of apparel and tell me what you'd like to give for them. Tilda, where are you going?"

"Just 'aving a look round the larder, Mr. 'Eathcote. Maybe that good-for-nothing cook may have forgotten a chicken or a pat o' butter. 'Tain't likely but one never knows. I'll be hup in a minute."

With a sniff that contained a suggestion of unbounded contempt for her late tyrant Tilda shuffled out of the room. Heathcote waited till the door closed and then glanced nervously at Mr. Samuels.

"You won't tell, will you?" With a feverish rapidity he recovered the silk socks and bundled them into the basket-work bag, covering them over with a miscellany of shirts and sleeping suits. "Fine girl, Tilda, Mr. Samuels, but a trifle Spartan—and if there's one thing on earth I can't stand it's all-wool socks. You won't mention it, will you?"

"Mum's the word," said Mr. Samuels solemnly. He produced his note-book and a stumpy pencil which bore him a strong family likeness. "What do you want for that coat, sir?"

"Isn't for sale, Samuels. Sentimental relic of

the dear departed—wedding get-up, in fact. Queer how one gets sudden fancies for things! Now here's a morning suit, though—Poole's finest effort—never worn yet. What's the offer?"

"Ten bob."

"Gone! A golf suit, latest shoulders, patent pockets, guaranteed to improve play at first round—"

"Three and six."

"Excellent. This is affluency. Mr. Samuels, you're sure you're not doing yourself an injustice?"

"Well, sir, I am going a bit high but one doesn't go close with a gentleman like you. Tell you what, sir, I'll give you five pounds down for the lot."

"Done!"

"Five-pound note do, sir?"

"Excellently well. What an exquisite feel there is about a five-pound note, isn't there, Mr. Samuels? I never noticed it before. Positively I am beginning to be grateful to old Jeremy for going bankrupt. I didn't think life had a thrill left for me and here I am childishly excited over a piece of watered paper. I'm sorry for the poor old duffer, though."

Mr. Samuels' face sobered.

"H'm. The poor old duffer didn't do you so badly at one time."

"I beg your pardon?"

Mr. Samuels coughed apologetically.

"I merely expressed admiration for your sentiments, sir."

Heathcote was by this time on the floor again

endeavoring to bring the black coat to some sort of orderly understanding with a torn piece of brown paper. Mr. Samuels watched the proceedings with a severe eye.

"Nice little chap, that boy of yours, sir."

"Yes, isn't he? I noticed it myself the other day. It took me five years to find out though. Think of that, Mr. Samuels—five years to find out that you've got a son and that he's a nice little chap."

"Bit slow, wasn't it, sir?"

"Oh, I don't know. My wife wasn't much better. She's only just found out—and only just in time, too, by jove. Confound the thing, what's the matter with the parcel?"

"If you tried wrapping the coat in the paper instead of other way round perhaps you'd get on a bit faster," Mr. Samuels suggested, adding as an afterthought: "Mrs. St. John will be glad to see you home, sir."

"Home? Haven't got a home, Samuels. My wife has—I haven't. I'm an outcast—a pariah. Glad to see me? I don't know, but like the carpenter I doubt. Women are queer, as I dare say at your time of life you know." He gave up the struggle with the parcel and sat staring gloomily in front of him. He had suddenly remembered the musician and the musician's stricken look of disappointment. "Women do a lot of damage," he commented bitterly.

"Aye, aye, sir." Mr. Samuels rose from his seat

on the packing case and dusted the checks with a careful hand. "And sometimes they get damaged," he added. "There's a little bit of a girl round at my place, sir, a nice little thing—used to be one of the Beautiful Bevy at the Lincoln, if you know them. Well, she was engaged to a sort of a music chap, a good-enough fellow with a bee in his bonnet. He thinks he's Paderewski and Backhaus all rolled in one whereas he's really a first-class grocer's assistant. However, they were engaged. And then some rascally swell got hold of her and turned her head. He made her think he was no end of a fine fellow and the end of it all was that she chucked her musician—wouldn't look at him. His trousers weren't creased and altogether he didn't come up to her ideals of all a man should be and all that. So they broke it off. Now she's nursing the ideal and a broken heart, and the ideal's gone off and a lot he cares for the damage he's done." Mr. Samuels snorted. "It's six of one and half a dozen of another, Mr. St. John, you can take my word for it."

Heathcote pushed the parcel mechanically to one side.

"I do," he said solemnly. "I do. 'Pon my word—I didn't know—I say, Mr. Samuels, that wasn't a true story, was it?"

"True, as I'm standing here, sir."

"What—what's the girl's name?"

"Well, sir, I don't see any harm in telling you,

especially as it's not an uncommon name—Jones. Elizabeth Jones."

"And the rascally swell?"

Mr. Samuels' brows darkened menacingly.

"If I knew I'd—I'd punch his head."

"Oh, you would?" Heathcote felt for his eyeglass and not finding it polished his cab number. "I suppose it does not occur to you, Mr. Samuels, that the rascally swell might have been quite well-intentioned?"

"No, it doesn't. What good intention makes a man humbug a girl, turn her head, pretend he's something he's not, ruin her life—"

"Oh, look here!" Heathcote rose hastily. "You know, you're exaggerating. Now I could give you quite a lot of suggestions. We might suppose for instance that this—eh—person wasn't particularly happy himself—misunderstood and all that you know—and perhaps he liked the girl thinking him rather a fine fellow—we might even go so far as to suppose that it helped him—eh—to be more of a fine fellow than he had been—in fact helped him to see things clearer all round." He cleared his throat vigorously. "I have no doubt—if he knew, of course—he'd been deuced anxious to put things right."

"H'm, that isn't quite so easy, Mr. St. John."

"No—I suppose not. It's a confoundedly awkward business—I mean—it would be, if he knew—"

"Which of course he doesn't," put in Mr. Samuels amiably.

"Eh—exactly." There was a moment's rather awkward silence. Mr. Samuels stared at his boots.

"I see your point, sir," he said. "I'm glad to be able to look at the thing from another point of view. Yours was more charitable. Judge as you would be judged, eh, sir?"

Heathcote nodded.

"Though of course I have no doubt the fellow is a rotter," he blurted out. "I only suggested—explantations. As you say, it's half a dozen of one and six of the other." He gathered up his parcel regardless of its incomplete condition. "'Pon my word, I believe I was judging harshly myself," he muttered.

Tilda put her untidy head round the door.

"I ain't found so much as a dry chicken bone!" she declared. "I thought as much—that good-for-nothing! I knew 'er. For all we can get out of this 'ouse we might as well go, Mr. 'Eathcote."

"Oh, very well, I'm ready. Here, Mr. Samuels—that's my latch-key—the last insignia of fallen greatness. Good-by and good luck to the married couple."

"Thanks." Mr. Samuels glanced at the key and then at Heathcote. The latter cut an unusual figure. His clothes were, as they had always been, the pride of the cleverest tailor in London and their juxtaposition with an untidy brown paper parcel

and a basket bag from which protruded a silk sock was, to say the least, incongruous. "You'll excuse me, sir," said Mr. Samuels, "but you're not going to be seen on the streets like that?"

"I've got my cab down-stairs," said Heathcote, half-way to the door.

Mr. Samuels' face puckered as though he had set his teeth in an unusually sour apple.

"I see—private hansom? I saw something of the sort as I came in. But there wasn't a driver for miles."

"I'm the driver."

"Eh—?"

"I am—the driver. Number 3505—usually on the Baker Street cab rank—at your service." He displayed his number with a faint pride. "It's my first day out and I'm to give the taxis fits. Au revoir, Mr. Samuels."

He was gone. Mr. Samuels collapsed on a packing case. For a full minute he did not move and his face was a panorama. Finally he bounded to his feet with an unexpected agility and rushed out of the room to the banisters.

"Hi—cabby!"

"Hullo there!" in muffled accents from the bottom of the stairs.

"I'll give you three shillings to drive me round the square to number — Mrs. Deschesney."

"Can't be done. I've got to get back to the Mews—"

"Well, afterward—in an hour's time."

A moment's hesitation.

"It's a shilling fare. Make it four bob and I'll do it."

"I'll engage you for the hour—ten shillings."

"Done!"

Mr. Samuels thereupon smiled for no particular reason, glanced dubiously at his check suit, patted his tie and hurried down-stairs in the wake of number 3505.

CHAPTER XXI

OLD FRIENDS

MRS. Deschesney sat by her tea-table staring blankly over the teacups at her visitor, whose teacup was empty for some time. Mrs. Deschesney made no offer to refill it, and Mrs. Smythe made not the slightest sign of taking her departure. She was much too absorbed in the outpouring of her information and in her endeavor to obtain like in return to notice her hostess' frigidity of manner—even supposing that she was given to noticing such things, which she was not.

"You know, my dear Adelaide," she was saying in that eager undertone affected by ladies who are always laboring under the burden of other people's secrets, "I guessed from the beginning that they were not telling the truth. There was a *je ne sais quoi* about Mrs. St. John's manner which made me suspicious at once, and as for Mr. St. John, he told one lie after another. And it was all so absurd, because, of course, it had to come out in the end. Now why do you think they did it?" She looked up appealingly with her head a little on one side, but Mrs. Deschesney's stare riveted on the spout of the teapot and proved uncommunicative.

"I don't know," she said stolidly. "Perhaps they didn't."

"Didn't what? Oh, yes, I see what you mean—they didn't mean to deceive me! Well, do you know, I hardly like to mention it, but there was such a funny rumor going round. Perhaps you ought to know—in fact, dear Adelaide, I feel it my duty to tell you. Some one actually told me that you were going to adopt the St. Johns' little boy with five thousand pounds a year as a douceur for the St. Johns. Quite absurd—wasn't it?"

"Quite," said Mrs. Deschesney, with grimly compressed lips.

"That's what I said!" Mrs. Smythe agreed enthusiastically. "Only, of course, Mrs. St. John is so fond of life, isn't she? And one could have imagined that the idea might have tempted her—after all, such a good thing for the boy too. But, of course, it seemed ridiculous that you of all people should want a child about the house." She waited hesitatingly for her hostess to say something.

"Do I look the sort of person to go round adopting other people's children?" Mrs. Deschesney demanded.

Mrs. Smythe blinked at the handsome, uncompromising features.

"Of course not," she said soothingly. "I hope you are not angry that I mentioned it, dear Adelaide. Only I felt that I should like to have your authority to contradict such a silly rumor."

"Please don't bother," dear Adelaide murmured.

"I feel it my duty. Though, of course, the whole idea is exploded now that Mrs. St. John has returned to her mother, and her husband has disappeared. It's quite a dreadful business, isn't it?—almost a tragedy. If only one knew what had become of Mr. St. John one's mind would be easier, wouldn't it?"

"It might—and it might not," said Mrs. Deschesney enigmatically.

Her visitor's eyes opened to their widest extent.

"You don't—mean—you don't think—anything dreadful? Oh, dear Adelaide, do tell me!"

"I haven't anything to tell you. I don't know what other people's minds are likely to do, do I?"

Mrs. Smythe rose and shook out her silk skirts like an injured peacock. Inwardly she was telling herself that "dear Adelaide" was really getting very trying.

"And to think it is all the fault of that uncle!" she said, preparing herself for an orderly retreat. "You know, I always had my doubts about Jeremy Harris—a terrible *vaurien*. I remember at the time he proposed to me—"

"Oh, he proposed to you?"

Mrs. Smythe smiled, vaguely reminiscent.

"Didn't you know? Oh, dear me, yes—long ago, of course. His attentions were most marked. I was quite sorry about it all, though I gave him no encouragement. After all, I couldn't, could I? His

father was a coal merchant or something, and then he is so very plain—"

The butler threw open the door.

"Mr. Samuels!" he announced, and the next minute a broad-shouldered, somewhat thick-set figure made its appearance on the threshold.

Mrs. Smythe suppressed a gasp, and then drew herself frigidly upright. Mrs. Deschesney rose and held out her hand.

"How do you do, Mr. Samuels?" she said. "Mrs. Smythe, may I introduce you? An old friend—you remember each other, no doubt?"

Mrs. Smythe stared icily through the newcomer's bullet head.

"I think we have met before," she admitted, "only in those days Mr. Samuels was Mr.—but perhaps I'm being indiscreet. Good-by, dear Adelaide!"

She did not actually draw her skirts aside as she sailed past, but her manner suggested that there was a case of measles in the room and that she was trying to escape infection. When the door closed upon her the remaining two looked at each other, and a slow grimace wrinkled up Mr. Samuels' round features.

"She didn't seem to like me as much as she used to," he said. "What do you think was wrong? Was it my clothes or my face—or both?"

"Both, I should think," Mrs. Deschesney said,

eying him with strong disapproval. "Is that—that suit new?"

"New?" Mr. Samuels inspected himself thoughtfully. "Well, 'new' is rather a relative term, isn't it? They're new for me, you know. I bought them yesterday—second-hand."

Mrs. Deschesney sat down.

"How dreadful," she said.

"Yes, isn't it?" He sighed. "But beggars can't be choosers, you know. I hope you don't mind. It was rather bad luck—my running into that old ferret. I'm afraid she'll compromise you forever."

"I dare say. But I hardly think it nice of you to call the object of one of your passionate attachments an 'old ferret.'"

"Passionate attachment? Really, Adelaide—"

"My name is not Adelaide—at least not for you, Mr. Samuels. At any rate the 'old ferret' has just been giving me a graphic description of one of your proposals to her."

"One of my— Well upon my word!" Mr. Samuels laughed gaily, and began to pour himself out a cup of tea. "I expect she was trying to make you jealous," he suggested.

"Jealous! Jeremy!"

"Mr. Samuels," he corrected.

"You are as intolerable as ever," she said, sitting back in her chair. Nevertheless a wintry smile had dawned across her features.

"You see, the old thing has an imagination," he went on placidly. "As far as I can remember I never got as far as one proposal, but I paid her a lot of attention—for the same purpose."

"What purpose?"

"Of making you jealous."

Mrs. Deschesney moved impatiently.

"You were and are ridiculous," she said.

"Yes, I realize that now. A ruse that wasn't likely to have the slightest effect on a woman so cased up in her own convictions as you were. You knew I was the son of a small merchant, and you knew I was after your money, and so, of course, I hadn't a chance."

He seated himself opposite, balancing his plate of bread and butter awkwardly on his knee. "It doesn't matter our talking about these things now; they are all over and done with, and we can afford to talk them over calmly."

"Yes," she agreed, but without much enthusiasm.

"For instance," he went on, "I always wanted to know how you found me out. I mean, how you knew that it was the money that tempted me? It was uncommonly smart—for a woman."

Her mouth set again in its old hard lines.

"Everybody is after money," she said coldly. "I guessed it from the beginning—and afterward I knew for certain."

"But your husband—"

She got up suddenly and went away from him to

the window where she stood with her back turned. Mr. Samuels looked after her, and then put his cup softly on the table. A change had come over his round weather-beaten face. It softened, and with that sudden expression of tenderness the plainness of his features became less marked.

"I'm sorry, Adelaide," he said quietly. "It's rather mean of me to take advantage of your permission to call on you, and then to worry you with the whys and wherefores of things. After all, we must judge by our own experiences, and you may be right. Perhaps I ought not to have come, but I couldn't resist; and after all, I won my bet, didn't I?"

She turned again and looked at him with knitted brows.

"You mean about the St. Johns?" she asked.

"Yes. It seems that five thousand pounds wasn't quite high enough, after all."

She gave a contemptuous little laugh.

"I'll give six thousand pounds if needs must," she said. "I want that child. It's an absurd fancy, but I want something which for a few years at least will cling to me without knowing why—without regard for the financial reasons for its affections. Of course, I know that afterward would come ingratitude and disappointment; but I am an old woman—"

"Old?" he interrupted.

For the first time she saw the change in his face,

and to hide the rising tide of color she passed her hand over her forehead to the gray hair.

"Yes, old," she repeated. "It's no good, Jeremy, you can't flatter me. Besides, it isn't flattery. I don't want to be young again."

"Nor I," he said under his breath.

There was a moment's silence. They were looking at each other, taking toll of each other's sorrows and of the traces which years and grief had left behind them. Then Mr. Samuels rose and came to her side.

"I hate you to be disappointed, Adelaide," he said, "but you'll never get Baby Archibald."

"You think not? You really believe that that little gust of maternal affection will stand poverty and petty trial? Look! Here is a letter from Mrs. St. John herself. I got it this morning. She says she is worrying about her husband and reproaches herself but feels that she has done the right thing, etc. In other words, she is waiting for another offer. As to Heathcote, I have not the least doubt that when he has smoked his last half-crown cigar, and had his first taste at trying to earn his own living, he will be round here with the same doubts and qualms of conscience."

Mr. Samuels took the proffered letter and read it carefully. There was a little smile about the corners of his mouth as he handed it back to her.

"Yes, she doesn't seem to be exactly happy,"

he agreed. "I suppose milking cows under the paternal eye is not the most exhilarating of occupations, though I know worse. But are you quite sure you have read the letter aright?"

"What do you mean?"

"I don't like to say; I hardly know myself. But I am quite willing to enter on another wager with you."

She laughed shortly.

"You are an incorrigible gambler," she said. "What is it now?"

"I wager my secret plus a correct foretelling of the immediate future as regards a certain important event, against your frank admission that you are mistaken about humanity in general and the St. Johns in particular. You believe that money is everything to them and to everybody. It isn't. They thought so, too, but they are beginning to find out the truth, as you will one day—that money, after all is nothing against—"

"Jeremy, don't talk platitudes to me!"

"I won't, Adelaide; I'll prove them to you."

"When?"

"I'll begin right away, if you'll tell me one thing."

"And what is that?"

"That you're a little sorry that you've spoilt things."

"What things?—for whom?"

"For yourself—and me."

"Jeremy!"

She looked away from him and he studied her keen profile intently.

"You did, you know. You can't pretend that you haven't suffered—and I don't want to try. It was not until I did try that I realized just what little difference wealth and power make. They're fine things to have but of themselves they don't make life worth living or even bearable. Unconsciously you've realized that much. You're trying to get even with Fate by buying a child—and a child's affection. It won't do, Adelaide—you can take my word for it. A child won't make up for what you've missed—I can."

She began to laugh.

"Jeremy!"

"And there's another part to my bargain," he went on in the same matter-of-fact tone. "I want you to admit—that you'd be a little glad to find out that you've been in the wrong—that you'd been rather hard on the rest of us poor mortals."

"Why should I be glad?" she demanded almost defiantly.

He looked her full in the eyes. And in that moment he seemed to grow taller. There was even a certain dignity and power in his bearing as he answered her.

"I can't tell you why; I only want to hear from you that you would be glad."

There was a moment's silence. She tried valiantly to retain her hard unmoved expression, but for

one moment a spasm of pain passed over her features, and she turned quickly away from him.

"Of course I should be glad," she said quietly. "My knowledge has poisoned my whole life. There have been times when I have cursed the power which gave me an insight into the hearts of those I loved."

He smiled unperceived.

"Yes, I know that. Do you know when I knew? It was this afternoon when you called me an 'old friend' to that—that woman. Unconsciously you stood up for me. It was a little thing, but it proved to me that your heart is not dead yet. And now I'm going to show you something. It is the first link in my chain." He took her by the hand and led her to the window. "Look!" he said.

Her eyes followed his pointing finger.

"Well?" she demanded with a touch of her old asperity. "What is there to see? A hansom cab—whose is it?"

"Mine."

"Isn't that rather an extravagance for Greene and Greene's valuer?"

"It is—decidedly. I shall have to go without my supper in consequence, and I hope you will be generous with the cake to make up for it. But I want you to notice the driver."

"What about him? He looks rather smarter than the usual run. Quite a good-looking man. Why—good heavens, it's—it's—"

"Number 3505—otherwise Mr. Heathcote St. John, late of Portland Square."

"But, Jeremy, in the name of all things, what is he doing?"

"Earning his living."

"Jeremy, it's not possible!"

"It's quite possible. I picked him up after he had driven a poor old body from Kensington to Waterloo for nothing. He's no business man but he's in dead earnest."

"But what are we going to do? I can't leave him out there!"

"You must. He has to stay by his horse."

"Jeremy, it's positively terrible. What shall I do?"

Mr. Samuels smiled grimly.

"You'd better send him out a glass of whisky and soda," he said. "Mrs. Smythe has passed for the third time and has just recognized him."

Mrs. Deschesney stood a moment in bewildered silence.

"And his wife—?"

"Knows nothing. Is probably milking cows in Somerset, or wherever the place may be. You see, Adelaide—"

She drew herself up severely.

"You called me Adelaide again," she said.

He looked at her, and his eyes twinkled.

"And you've been calling me Jeremy the best part of the afternoon," he retorted. "And now hadn't you better go and see about that whisky?"

CHAPTER XXII

LIZZIE GROWS MILITANT

"LIZZIE, where's my hot water?"

"Coming, sir, coming!"

"And my boots!"

"Yes—sir! Coming!"

She had been scrubbing the kitchen stairs. With a smothered little sigh she scrambled up from her knees, wiped her hands on her apron and trotted down kitchenward. Opposite the kitchen was Mrs. Belbury's apartment. At first sight it might seem singular that a lady of refinement (a captain's widow) should choose the lower region for her "study" as she called it, but Mrs. Belbury—perhaps owing to her military associations—was nothing if not strategical. She had two sets of enemies to contend with, up-stairs her guests and down-stairs her servants—the latter consisting of Lizzie and a down-at-heels elderly person of unprepossessing appearance who was euphemistically called "cook." Of these two the down-stairs army was by far the more dangerous. The guests were a more or less tame and intimidated party. They consisted, for the most part, of waifs and strays of Society, spinsters who had been brought up to marry but whom no

one had married—disconsolate females forever harping on their femininity as their chief asset; widows somber in crape and the murkiness of a dim vaguely-suggested past; here or there a sprightly lady with peroxide hair and a flashing manner with whom the masculine element kept up a spasmodic flirtation. They were all intensely respectable. To listen to them was to listen to Virtue herself. One felt the presence of the defunct bishops and generals who were forever hurried out of their graves to prove an alibi for their descendants in the regions of the best Society. Nobody looking at the Widow or the Spinster or the Sprightly Lady or at the "late stockbroker" and "retired Indian official" could ever have supposed it possible that life had dealt hardly with them, so easy and self-confident was their manner toward one another. It was only when they encountered Mrs. Belbury that the reality showed through. To them Mrs. Belbury represented life itself. Mrs. Belbury could cow them with a glance, a gesture. She held a power over them which made complaint a feat of unprecedented daring. Consequently Mrs. Belbury despised rather than feared.

But the cook was an enemy worthy of her steel. Cook not only defied but cheated her. The warfare between them was open though it never occurred to either of them to put an end to it by separation. They were mutually indispensable. No other cook would have put up with Mrs. Belbury and no other mistress would have put up with the cook, so

that with the tacit understanding that all means to any end were legitimate they alternately fought and held together, only uniting definitely when confronted with the common enemy—the guests. Under these circumstances it behooved Mrs. Belbury to be constantly on the scene of action. From her "study" window she had a full view of the area and the area steps. She knew when the butcher came and how long he stayed, she knew whether cook received visitors and whether they left with parcels which they had not brought. From her study door she kept guard over the staircase. Consequently Lizzie's unusually hurried descent provoked her to instant investigation.

"Why aren't you doing the stairs, Lizzie?"

"Please, ma'am, Mr. Samuels wants his boots and his hot water."

"Hot water!" Mrs. Belbury sniffed angrily. "Who wants hot water at this time of the day! One would think hot water made itself. Who's Mr. Samuels, I should like to know. Just you go back to your stairs, Lizzie, and don't take any notice. Let him fetch his boots himself."

"But—if you please—ma'am—"

"Don't argue. That reminds me—cook's going out to-night. You'll have to cook the supper."

She drew back preparatory to slamming the door but something in the girl's face caught her attention. "Well, what's the matter?" she demanded sharply.

"If you please—it's my evening out—you promised—"

"Nonsense! One evening is as good as another. You can have another."

"Please—that isn't it—it's the concert to-night—Mr. Simpson's concert. I've got my ticket—I bought it—"

A sour smile passed over Mrs. Belbury's features.

"I can't help that, can I? If you waste your money on tickets that's your affair, though I should like to know where the money came from. Anyhow, you can't go, so that's an end to the matter."

The tears rushed to the pale eyes. For a wonder she checked them before the overflow and then something equally wonderful and unusual happened.

"I shall go," said Miss Elizabeth Jones.

For a moment Mrs. Belbury refused to believe that she had heard aright.

"What did you say—?"

"I said I should go," said Miss Jones, with a white face and an extraordinary manner.

"If you do you'll go altogether."

"I don't care."

Mrs. Belbury folded her arms. This phenomenon of a maid-of-all-work in a revolt momentarily bereft her of her presence of mind. From afar off a gruff masculine voice called upon "Lizzie" for his boots and hot water in no uncertain accents.

"I'm coming, sir," called Lizzie, no less loudly,

though with a quiver of excitement in her thin voice.

"If you take that man's hot water," began Mrs. Belbury slowly and menacingly, "I'll—" She was going to say "cut your wages," but remembering that Miss Jones didn't get any, she stopped in time. "I'll have your boxes searched—" she substituted. "It's my impression that you're not an honest person—"

"You can search my boxes as much as you like," interrupted Miss Jones with a rush. "There's nothing in this house anybody in their right senses would want to take. And if it comes to honesty there are one or two things—"

"Lizzie, be silent!"

"I shan't!"

"I'll make you impossible in every situation you put your nose into."

"Who cares!"

"You're mad!" declared Mrs. Belbury, helpless with temper. She was indeed incapable of understanding what train of gunpowder she had inadvertently set light to. In all her life, with the exception of Mr. Samuels, whom she cordially disliked, and her husband, who died of the results, no one had ever defied her. And now there was a half-starved maid-of-all-work actually humming insolently and banging the hot-water cans in open insurrection. She went past Mrs. Belbury humming and

hummed all the way up to the first flight, when she broke down and cried. It is a fine thing to throw one's bread and butter on the floor and trample on it but there comes the inevitable reaction when the bread and butter seems peculiarly desirable and further supplies equally unattainable. Besides, why had she done it? What did it matter whether she went to the concert or not? Who cared? Who would notice her? She would be lost in the great crowd—and the musician would neither see her nor think of her. He would be thinking of the fine ladies in the ten by six seats in all the splendor of their jewels and expensive dresses. Whereupon, for no apparent reason, Miss Jones wept the more bitterly, and entered Mr. Samuels' bedroom with red eyes and stifled sobs. Mr. Samuels, who was struggling with a tie of quite surprisingly sober pattern, caught a glimpse of her face in the glass.

"Lizzie," he said severely, "you're crying again."

Miss Jones pleaded guilty with a sniff. "You shouldn't do it," Mr. Samuels went on. "It's bad for the digestion and spoils the complexion. When you're my age you'll learn to appreciate these things. Now what's the matter?"

"I'm going, sir."

"Going where?"

"I don't know," drearily.

Mr. Samuels, having completed a neat bow, turned and stared. "You don't mean to say that you've been fired again?"

"Yes, sir."

"In that case you stop calling me 'sir' and we'll go back generally speaking to the *status quo ante.* You don't know what that means, do you? Never mind. It's a compressed way of asking you to sit down and tell me all about it."

Miss Jones sat down. Unlike Mrs. Belbury she had a weakness for this thick-set, square-jawed person. He inspired confidence. She was not afraid of him which in Miss Jones' relation to the guests was an unusual feature. Mr. Samuels pulled on his coat.

"Now!" he said.

"It was about to-night," she began.

"I see—or rather, I don't. What is there about to-night which could cause friction in this peaceful and refined home?"

"It was my night out—and she promised—"

"And she didn't keep her promise? And you defied her on that score? Miss Jones, I'm afraid you must be a militant in disguise. They're the only people who seem to object to trifles of that sort nowadays. I thought less of you—"

"But it's his concert!" she broke in almost with passion.

"Oh," said Mr. Samuels thoughtfully. "I see—I really see this time. It's his concert—Mr. Simpson's concert?"

"Y-es."

"And you are going? He gave you a ticket?"

"No—I bought it—a two-shilling one."

Mr. Samuels nodded. His small blue eyes were even brighter than usual and his mouth was pursed up in the stern endeavor to suppress a smile.

"So Mr. Simpson's nose isn't quite out of joint after all," he reflected. "He'll be pleased to think you've gone."

"I—I don't think so, sir."

"Yes, he will. I know better. And when he knows you've thrown up your place to go—"

"He mustn't—he mustn't ever know—"

"Supposing I tell him?" She looked at him with wide-open puzzled eyes and he leaned forward from his place in the armchair and tapped her on the knee. "Miss Jones, I have a knack of knowing just what makes people happy. It's queer what things do make people happy—you'd be surprised. The most unselfish folk can't help being pleased to think that some one they cared for has been through discomfort, even sorrow for their sakes. Now, I'll wager my best hat that Mr. Simpson will be more pleased over this than over all the applause he gets to-night."

Miss Jones shook her head.

"He doesn't care. He has his grand friends—"

"Supposing his grand friends are not quite so grand as he thought they were? Supposing they deserted him—eh—?"

"Why should they?"

"I don't know—it's a way friends—and especially grand friends—have. Miss Jones"—very

earnestly—"why don't you go and make it up with Mr. Simpson? Why don't you make a new start—after to-night? I believe he'll want you badly and women have a knack of sticking to a man when he's down—"

"Down?" she echoed blankly.

"Supposing things went wrong with Mr. Simpson, you'd go back to him, wouldn't you?"

Miss Jones rose slowly to her feet. Her red-rimmed eyes were fixed wistfully on something afar off, seen only to herself.

"I couldn't, Mr. Samuels," she said, "I'd be his friend—but not that. You don't understand.—"

"Yes, I do." Mr. Samuels had risen also and his voice was gruff and peremptory. "I understand too well, young woman. It's that rascally fellow who's got hold of your fancy—that St. John. You think he's a god on earth and a hero and a martyr all rolled in one, don't you? Don't answer, I know it perfectly well and my questions are only there to punctuate my eloquence. Now, I am going to tell you something you won't like. That St. John of yours is a fraud. You think he earns all his money with the sweat of his brow, don't you? Well, I know him and I give you my solemn word he never earned a penny or did a square day's work in his life until yesterday. You think he's busy putting his wicked old uncle on his legs again? I tell you he lived on that misguided old duffer for as many years as he graced this earth and when the afore-mentioned

duffer went to smash Mr. Heathcote St. John was prepared to sell his own son to an old maiden aunt person for five thousand pounds rather than face the music. It was Mrs. St. John who saved him from such depths and now he's driving a hansom cab because it's the only thing he's fit for."

"It's not true!" said Miss Elizabeth Jones.

Mr. Samuels passed his handkerchief over a heated brow.

"Misguided girl, ask him yourself."

"I shall!" She was trembling from head to foot with indignation and her eyes positively shone. "And I think it really mean of you to try and throw mud at a man like that," she went on passionately. "It's just mean spite. You envy him. And he's worth twice of you—and—and—"

Mr. Samuels waved his hand despairingly.

"This comes of telling the truth to a woman. Miss Jones, have it your own way. Keep that good-for-nothing rascal in his niche by all means, but don't blame me afterward if he tumbles out of his own accord. Miss Jones—for goodness' sake don't cry."

"I'm not crying—I'm—I'm only angry."

"Well, don't be angry." He patted her awkwardly. "Lood here—I've got something for you."

"I don't want it—"

"Miss Jones, I'm a business man and I go in for fair and square bargains. I'm going to make one

of them with you. I want you to take this envelope. There's no money in it—I can't afford to go round giving people money—but if after the concert tonight you feel just a little less angry with me—a little more inclined to follow the advice of an old fellow who wishes you well—will you open it?"

She hesitated, looking alternately at his earnest face and at the unpretentious envelope. She was already modified. Miss Jones had the soft heart which usually goes with an inclination to tearfulness and she was beginning to see that she had been rude and unkind. Possibly her belief in Mr. Samuels' sanity had been a trifle shaken. At any rate her tone was soothing when she answered him.

"Well, well—I don't mind if I do—I promise."

"That's good. And one thing more—I ask from the most friendly motives—you've got enough money to manage for a night or two?"

"Oh, yes, thank you, sir."

"That's first rate, too. Good-by—and good luck to you both."

They shook hands, though by this time Miss Jones was quite certain that Mr. Samuels had become mentally unbalanced. She slipped out of the room through as narrow an aperture in the doorway as was physically possible—after the manner of her profession—but on the other side—Mrs. Belbury awaited her.

"You'll pack your trunks at once," the captain's

widow informed her with a venom of long-suppressed wrath. "You're a disgrace. What have you been telling Mr. Samuels?"

"I expect you know just as well as I do," said Miss Jones in the don't-me-care spirit of one whose boats were burned long ago.

"You'll leave the house in half an hour!"

"In twenty minutes if it can be managed."

"And don't come to me for a character!"

"I wouldn't for the world!" retorted Miss Jones from over the banisters.

Mrs. Belbury gasped for the second time that afternoon and to tell the truth Miss Jones gasped too. She was almost as much a surprise to herself as to Mrs. Belbury. She had never been rude or violent in her life before and now she had been both with the success of custom. But it is a truth which people rarely realize until it is too late that if you bottle up the steam of the smallest, most harmless little machine in the world the time will inevitably come when in spite of the best intentions the machine will blow up and cause quite a surprisingly large and unpleasant commotion. Now Miss Jones had been suppressed all her life, first by the rigors of Surbiton convention as regards the place of women in the world generally and in suburbia particularly, afterward by inappreciative theatrical managers whose business relations with a discerning British public compelled them to judge a woman's value by the cut of her ankles; and finally by Mrs. Belbury whose one idea in life was to get as much

as was humanly possible out of her without killing her.

And now Miss Jones had "blown up." She did not stop to think now what was going to happen to her. She packed as one would imagine a whirlwind packing if it found such an unpleasant business necessary to its progress. In ten minutes all Miss Jones possessed had been crammed into one much worn, congested-looking portmanteau and five minutes after that again she shook the dust of Mrs. Belbury's refined home from her feet. Her hat was a little over one ear and she was still breathless but she was free—wonderfully, riotously free. True, it was a freedom limited—as is the way of freedom in this world—by the length of her purse which at that moment contained exactly four shillings, three pence, three farthings, but this fact did not disconcert her. Anybody who defied Mrs. Belbury was capable of defying anything and she went her way with an elate don't-care-a-fig air that caused a small boy to yell "Yuh—Suffragette!" in the raucous accents of his species. Miss Jones heeded nothing. Her mind was made up. It was now four o'clock. Mr. Simpson's concert was not till eight and in the meantime there was much to be done. Above all else she must see Mr. St. John. She would tell him of the evil that was being spoken of him—she would see and hear it disproved with her own eyes and ears. Her heart still burned with indignation at the thought of how wicked and spiteful the most good-natured seeming people can be. She could not think

kindly of Mr. Samuels at all and his mysterious envelope lying at the bottom of her shabby little hand-bag was to her as a coiled snake that might strike at any moment.

Just for an instant her thoughts wandered to the musician. Somehow the thought pained her. He had not looked so well or so happy as he should have done. And then that curious faintness and the tears that had sprung to his eyes! And how strangely moved he had been when she told him about the ticket! Was it possible— The question remained unformed, the thought faded before a braver, more radiant light. Like the humble-minded little Gretchen under the walnut tree she lifted her eyes to it in undesiring adoration. How wonderful, how condescending, how unpretentious he was, how noble his disguised wanderings and unthanked charity among the unloved—like the famous Caliph in the *Arabian Nights* of whom she would have undoubtedly thought had she known anything about the *Arabian Nights*—which she didn't. And then—although she did not know it in the least—she thought of his clothes, and the gentlemanly pearl in his tie and his air of aloof refinement and languid self-possession. Beside him the musician loomed up as something grotesque—almost funny with baggy green-hued trousers and wild hungry-looking eyes. Miss Jones smiled to herself, not unkindly but with a gentle compassion.

By this time she had reached "The King's Head." "The King's Head" is a public house and outside Miss Jones hoped to find some willing soul to fetch her boxes in return for a mild remuneration. But there was no one—or at least only a cabman busy with his horse's nose-bag. She touched him on the arm.

"Could you tell me if there's any one inside?" she began. The cabby turned and involuntarily lifted his sleek top hat.

"I beg your pardon—"

"Mr. St. John!"

The nose-bag dropped in the gutter. Miss Jones clung to the shaft of the hansom for support. "Mr. St. John!" she echoed. Heathcote held out a neatly-gloved hand.

"How d'ye do, Miss Jones? This is a pleasant surprise! I was just going in to have my lunch. You get a first-rate spread here for sixpence and they won't have me at the Ritz any more. I say, you're not going to faint?"

She shook her head feebly.

"No—no. Mr. St. John—it's—it's a joke, isn't it?"

"A joke—do you mean me?" he looked himself anxiously up and down. "I'm not intended as a joke, you know—"

"I don't mean that. I mean—it isn't true—?"

"What isn't true?" he asked gently.

"That—" she jerked her head at the cab. "That you're doing that?"

He looked at her and the spark of humor in his blue eyes died out.

"It's quite true, Miss Jones."

"But why?"

"Because I've come a cropper and because driving a cab is the only thing I'm good for—that's why."

"Then—it's all true?"

"What's all true?"

"What—what I was told." She clasped her thin, cotton-gloved hands in desperate appeal. "Mr. St. John, I wouldn't believe it—I won't believe it even now if only you'll say it isn't true."

He put his head a little on one side and smiled at her in his gentle pleasant way.

"My dear girl, how can I say anything if you don't tell me what you won't or don't believe."

"He—I was told that you'd gone smash—you'd never earned a penny and you wanted to—to sell your son—and that you pretended—humbugged. I was that angry—I couldn't think it possible. I thought—I think so splendidly of you, Mr. St. John. You—the idea of you meant so much to me—it changed my life—it made everything different—I can't believe it."

Her hat was quite crooked now and there were tears in her voice and on her cheeks. In that jerky little confession there had been a whole world of

pathos—the incoherent expression of a drab life illuminated by a brief flash of lime-light which in its ignorance had been taken for the light of the sun. Heathcote looked at his boots, at the tip of the horse's nose, finally at the housetops. He had lost color and his jaw was hard set.

"Miss Jones," he said at last. "It is true. I don't know exactly what your unknown informant told you but substantially he seems to have got the hang of the story. I'm an out and outer, I'm a scamp and a ne'er-do-well. I never did a stroke of decent work in my life—I never did anybody a genuine good turn. I never cared for anybody but myself. I married because it was convenient to marry and when the smash came I was perfectly prepared to give my son to any stranger who was prepared to help me out of the mess. My wife left me because she was a world too good for me. As for my little jaunts among the music-halls—I did that because—I was bored."

She gave a little gasping cry and he winced. "You see, it was a sort of game—a new sensation. I—I took to you because it was such a joke to have any one who—thought of me—as you did. I humbugged you all along the line—for the fun of the thing—" He blinked at the chimney-pots. "I am a cad," he said with solemn conviction. And then he looked her fair and square in the eyes. "And I'm glad you know it," he added. She made no answer. Her face was deadly white and there was a hard line

about her mouth that had not been there before. "I'm afraid it's been a bit of a jar for you," Heathcote went on carelessly. "To tell you the truth it's been a bit of a jar for me—being found out. I'm not used to it. I'm awfully sorry."

"I'm glad," she said in a very low quiet voice. "I'm glad I've found you out—in time. I've been a very silly girl—and very unjust. Good-by, Mr. St. John."

She ignored his tentative hand and he smiled wryly.

"Good-by—Miss Jones, I suppose you couldn't try to think less harshly of me, could you?"

"I shall try not to think of you at all."

He nodded.

"Well, I dare say it's the best thing you can do."

He watched her until she had disappeared round the next corner, the while polishing the ubiquitous eye-glass with assiduous care.

"Well, I guess I put that straight," he said, sighing. Then he gathered up the nose-bag and scrambled back into his perch with an unusual heaviness. He had forgotten his lunch.

Somehow or other he had lost his appetite.

CHAPTER XXIII

A RUSH AT THE END

THE musician sat in the greenroom with his head between his hands. It wanted another half-hour to the great moment and from his attitude it might have been supposed that he was gathering inspiration whereas instead he was piecing together the memory of a single day and episode. The episode might have been called "the fall of the idol" of something equally cinematographic, but at any rate the idol had gone the way of idols—it had fallen and now it lay in the dust of disillusion—shattered beyond repair. The musician had not believed it possible. He had been so sure. He could not believe that she had really forgotten. There had been something suspicious in Mr. St. John's manner. No doubt they had quarreled—he was so obviously incapable of understanding the sensitive artistic side of her nature. There was at any rate some explanation. Of that the musician had been quite certain. And so—he had done that sort of thing a man of genius would do; he had sold his upright and with the proceeds he had gone down to Shropshire. He had walked four

miles to the vicarage along the dusty shadeless road and he had sat in the prim orthodox drawing-room and waited for her. He had still been full of hope. Not even the antimacassars or the stuffed owl under a glass case had been able to shake his faith. Not even the *Guides to Devotion* which were arranged in carefully thought-out angles on the drawing-room table had cast a shadow over his glowing thought of her. He had believed so implicitly. And then she had appeared. As he sat there with closed eyes he saw her again as she had entered, in a rough tweed skirt, rather crooked, and thick brown boots, with her hair scraped back and her neck encased in an uncompromising linen collar. Even now the recollection made him wince with almost physical pain. For the moment he had not recognized her, then he had blurted out the reason for his coming. "He had hoped so much—couldn't she—wouldn't she make it possible to come?"

Mrs. St. John shook her misused head. She was sorry but things had changed. Rich people could indulge in whims, and she wasn't rich any more. It had amused her to help and encourage him when there was nothing better doing, but now one had to get back to the reality of life. "You see, I liked you so much for being so brave and self-confident," she had said, "but you know I really don't know anything about music at all. It was just a fancy of mine. You mustn't mind. And I hope you'll do awfully well."

And then she had given him a cup of tea and Mrs. Hamilton had discussed parochial matters with him in a chill tone of disapproval. She gave him to understand that art and music were nearly akin to the seven deadly sins and hoped that, being an Englishman, he would devote his talent to oratorios. And then he had walked four miles to the railway station with stinging eyes and an aching heart. If he had known that Mrs. St. John had spent an hour straining back her hair and that she had wept scalding tears of remorse over the idol she had deliberately shattered he might have felt comforted. But this knowledge was not vouchsafed him. All that he knew was that the one person who had seemed to believe in him had not and could not have believed in him and that by some mysterious process he had ceased to believe in himself. She had been his inspiration—a false inspiration.

The agent put his head in at the door.

"Old lady just bought a ticket for the gallery," he announced breathlessly. "That's three."

Mr. Simpson nodded without looking up. Three! Well, it was something. If he could make these three believe in him—! The agent made a perturbed reappearance.

"Old lady says she thought it was a meeting for the Propagation of the Gospel in the Fiji Islands. Wants her money back. What shall we do?"

"Oh, give it her back," wearily. "What does it matter!"

"Well, I don't know. A shilling's a shilling. It'd teach her to be a bit more careful."

However he departed. The musician glanced at the clock. Another ten minutes! In the glass opposite he caught a glance of his own face—a white haunted reflection—and of his figure in the hired evening clothes which the owner assured him fitted like a glove. The vision frightened him. He tried to remember the opening bars of the Bach fugue with which his program began—he had been advised that an English audience prefers to get its classics over as quickly as possible—but the very notes eluded him. They danced before his eyes—horrid little black and white sprites—that slipped through his fingers as he clutched at them. The perspiration gathered on his forehead. He felt sick and faint and an infamous craving seized his legs to spring up and carry him off—away, anywhere, back to the grocery store and the white apron—and all that he had hopelessly lost.

"Time's up, Mr. Simpson."

The musician looked about him wildly. The retreat was cut off. It was too late—it had to be gone through with somehow. He passed his handkerchief over his forehead with a shaking hand.

"Thank you. I—I suppose it's pretty empty?"

"Pretty bad. There's a round dozen in the Circle—ghosts, most of them—and twenty or thirty in the stalls. I gave a pal of mine six for his family.

Thought you wouldn't mind and it fills up and makes things look a bit more cheery."

"Thanks."

He stumbled toward the curtained doorway.

"But we've got the Press," whispered the agent with triumph.

Somehow the knowledge did not comfort. The great hall gaped at him with a wide-open hungry mouth. Its desolation appalled. It was like a graveyard with the empty seats as stones. The scattered audience were like specks in the immensity. In the front row was the agent's "pal" with his wife and four children. The musician saw their faces with a horrible distinctness—fat round faces fixed in a blank unfeeling stare. The musician bowed—and from above—away at the back of the gallery some one clapped, energetically, fiercely, in defiance of the silence. The musician started—and remembered. He looked up and thought he saw her, her white eager face among the shadows. She didn't believe in him but she had come.

He sat down. He fought the gathering weakness with the tenacity of despair. This was his chance—the only chance he might ever have. If he was only the man he wanted to be, he might still win through. If he could sweep the sleepy critics into a frenzy of enthusiasm—! But as he touched the first notes and heard their weakness echo through the stillness a kind of paralysis crept over him. And little by little he understood that he didn't understand—that

this music through which he was fumbling his way was beyond and above him. It had sounded well enough in his little garret—here amid the unheard echoes of the great masters he knew that it was an insult and an impertinence.

But he played on bravely. Then came a nocturne. It was as though something whispered in his ear: "You're not fit for it. Don't you hear how weak and sentimental it all is? Aren't you musician enough to know that you're no good?" He tried to shut out the voice. He played slower and lingered heavily on the melody; in his despair he forced the expression into the grotesque, accentuating where no one had ever accentuated before and accelerating wildly where the difficulties were beyond him. With the last note he heard the family whispering together. The youngest child had shown symptoms of discontent and was being alternately shaken and cajoled into silence; from the gallery came the persistent, passionate applause; one of the critics unfolded himself and took up his hat from under the seat. The musician burst into Liszt's *Rhapsody No. 2.* It was a moral effort to seize the renegade by the coat-tails and force him back into his place. Nothing was spared. Both pedals were applied. The Bechstein quivered from stem to stern. For the moment the musician's heart beat high. He dazzled, intoxicated himself with sound. Surely there was grandeur in this—fire, temperament, rhythm! But in the quiet passage he realized

that one critic had gone and that another was stealing up the aisle. In the next crescendo he failed—he banged wrong notes, which had never happened to him before, for he was scrupulously correct—and suddenly the youngest child burst into a wail of irrepressible anguish. The musician rose from his place. He had still a sonata to play before the end of the first division of his program. But he was past caring. He bowed mechanically and the clapping in the gallery, grown almost frantic in its insistence, mingled with the smothered screams of outraged infancy and followed him into the green-room. The agent stared at him aghast.

"Hello, what's wrong?"

The musician waved him aside.

"I can't," he said thickly. "I can't go on—tell them I'm ill—I *am* ill—give them back their money."

"There isn't any money to give back," the agent observed, "except that enthusiast in the gallery. She's the only one who's paid."

"Give her back her money. Tell her how it was—and—and—thank her."

"Oh, all right. If the box-office hasn't bolted with the bank, I'll get him to collect the pennies." He glanced back over his shoulder at the motionless huddled-up figure by the table. "Well, if this isn't the sharpest frost I've ever been in!" he muttered. "If it wasn't that expenses were covered I'd call it a damn swindle."

The door closed. The wailing lost itself in the distance and all was silent. The peace was like a touch of a soothing hand on his tortured nerves. He put his hands to his face. It had been his chance—and he had failed miserably. She knew now—knew that he was nothing but the grocer's assistant he had always been—and to-morrow every one would know. The thought of it stung——

The door opened again—very gently this time—and grinding his teeth upon his humiliation he did not turn. Then some one touched him on the shoulder.

"Elizabeth!"

She said nothing. She knelt down beside him and put her arms about his neck and drew his aching head on her shoulder. And after that one smothered exclamation he did not speak either. He clung to her wildly, like a child, and she held him with all the strength of an aroused motherhood. The minutes passed. He freed himself a little.

"You shouldn't have come, Elizabeth. But it was decent of you—you've stuck to me all through—even to this. Only I can't stand—pity—yet."

"It isn't pity. My poor boy! I haven't come with pity. I can't explain—don't you see, my dear—if you'd have had it all your own way—I'd have gone and never come near you again. I'd have been glad and proud for your sake—but I—I should have gone away with an ache in my heart. I should have been so lonely."

"Lonely?"

She passed her hand over his white drawn face.

"Harold, you mustn't let it trouble you—you mustn't let it make any difference. I know you've gone on and left me miles behind—I know I'm not fit for a man like you. You've got your other friends—but I thought I'd tell you—I thought somehow you might like to know this evening—I've been foolish and blind. I couldn't see the real gold in you—I lost my head over silly worthless things, and I judged all wrong, but I've never loved any one but you—never—and I—never shall." Her voice broke. He looked at her. He did not see how plain she was. The straw-colored hair hung in wisps about the pale tear-stained face and the cheap straw hat with the bedraggled poppies hung ludicrously over one ear. But he did not see that it was ludicrous. He only saw the passionate earnestness in her streaming eyes—heard only the deep sincerity in the thin quavering voice.

"You shouldn't say all that," he began huskily. "I—jeered at you because you were a servant—you weren't good enough for me—and all the time I wasn't worth anything—just a grocer's assistant—with a swelled head—who chucked his chances and went after the stars——" He clenched his hands. "Just because I could tinkle a bit on the piano—and I might have had the little store down Putney—I might be my own boss—and make a home for you."

"It isn't too late, Harold." She leaned her head against his shoulder. "It's never too late."

"It's too late to win you back again."

"You've never lost me—if you want me——"

"There's no one else?"

"No one."

He took a deep quivering breath.

"I'm glad. I've lost everything—but I don't mind so much if you're there. Perhaps—after all—I shall make good when I get my chance—so you won't be ashamed of me. I can't play the piano—but I can work."

"My dear—I know—but I'm not ashamed—I'm proud. You fought so bravely. That counts for a lot—more than anything. I know you'll fight just as bravely in our little shop—you'll work it up to something big—and perhaps they'll make you Sir Harold Simpson——" She laughed tremulously and he buried his face in his thin hands.

"There isn't any little shop. We've got to begin right at the bottom—all over again."

"Not quite. Look, Harold!" She had pushed a letter before him and drew his hands away tenderly, insistently. "It's as though the fairies had watched over us. Look, it's from Mr. Samuels—to you and me! The little shop down Putney—we're to have it—and pay back year by year till it's ours. Read, dear!"

There was a long silence. The brief, neatly written little letter slipped from his fingers.

"You won't refuse now?"

"We'll go together and thank him. It's more luck than I deserve."

His voice shook with the new painful humility. His arm was about her. The hat with the red poppies had slipped forgotten to the floor and his head rested against hers.

"My dear, you deserve all the world——"

"I've got you."

She smiled a little, contentedly, peacefully, and the smile lighted up the plain face with a charm that promised greater things to come.

"And we'll make it so neat and clean and dainty," she said dreamily. "Everybody will want to buy at Simpson's. And you'll pile up the biscuit-tins like you used to. Do you remember how people admired it and talked. That was the time you got your rise."

He nodded. A faint color glowed in his cheeks.

"Yes, I was rather neat at that—wasn't I—and there was another thing I thought of—something to do with the dry fruits. I've got to work it out still, but——"

"And in the back parlor we'll have a piano."

He shook his head.

"I won't play any more. I'm not good enough."

"It's good enough for me."

Another long silence.

"You'll have to throw up your job at Mrs. Belbury's."

"I've lost it already. It was your concert night —and—she wouldn't let me come. And I had to come. I didn't care what happened."

"Elizabeth!" He held her closer. "You dared do that for—me?"

She laughed a little.

"It wasn't anything—it didn't matter."

She kissed him. "Nothing matters now. We have each other," she said with all the philosophy of the world.

In the great hall the lights had long since been turned out. The box-office had closed and the agent taken his departure. The musician had been forgotten. Just for a moment he had been lifted out of the flood—and now the flood had drawn him in again. Somehow it didn't matter now they had each other.

He drew on his overcoat over the hired suit. The old hat with the poppies was lifted out of the dust. He helped her dust it with his handkerchief.

Then hand in hand they wandered out into the busy street of a New World.

CHAPTER XXIV

I TOLD YOU SO

FOR the tenth time since the prodigal's return to the parental roof, Mrs. Hamilton explained exactly what she thought about things in general and about the St. Johns' menage in particular.

"You see, my dear Cecilia," she said, "this comes of going against the advice of your parents. I'm not one of those people who always say 'I told you,' but you must admit that from the very beginning I warned you against Heathcote. Of course, he's a very nice young man and all that sort of thing, but you know, my dear, a man who idles through life——"

"I don't think Heathcote did idle," her daughter put in with a meekness that covered over a certain amount of resentment. "He belonged to quite a lot of clubs, and once he went to a political meeting and made a speech—or listened to one, I've forgotten which."

"Political meetings and clubs and fiddlesticks!" Mrs. Hamilton ejaculated with as much heat as her phlegmatic disposition allowed. "That is not work, my child. Now, if he had gone into an office or had

a business—yes, if he had even kept a crossing I should have respected him——"

"But you would not have let me marry him," Cecilia ventured.

Mrs. Hamilton smoothed out her stiff silk dress.

"My dear, that is neither here nor there. There are a great many people whom I heartily respect, but whom I should not consider eligible as husbands. There is David, the gardener, for instance. A worthy man, in character infinitely Heathcote's superior."

"Really, mother!"

"Cecilia, don't interrupt me! I am speaking purely from a moral point of view, and from a moral point of view he is Heathcote's superior. You should see the way he looks after the strawberry beds."

"I don't see what strawberry beds and morals have got to do with each other," Mrs. St. John broke in again. At the same time her needle snapped, which accident probably accounted for the flush which mounted to the roots of her fair hair. Her mother smiled the smile peculiar to people who feel themselves very much in the right.

"No, my dear, you wouldn't. The connection is, perhaps, not very obvious. But when you consider the patient labor, the faithfully fulfilled duty which those strawberry beds represent, you will understand what I mean when I say that to my mind

David is the more worthy character. Now, I ask you, would Heathcote undertake a menial task for your sake? Of course not—you know he wouldn't."

"He hasn't had the chance yet," Cecilia objected feebly.

"The chance is there now," her mother retorted dramatically, "but he will not recognize it. I know exactly what he will do—just what all young men of his class do. Either he will accept a sinecure post from some commiserating friend, or will borrow money to go to the bad altogether." Mrs. Hamilton's tone grew more cheerful as her hopes descended. "At any rate, the idea of maintaining his wife and child by honest labor will never occur to him," she completed with grim satisfaction.

Mrs. St. John let her needlework fall from her hand. She was looking pale and listless, perhaps as a result of the needlework, which was of a vivid and uncompromising pattern. But there were also tears in her eyes, and it is doubtful whether even the most artistic can be wrought to such a state of emotion by the mere sight of pale blue roses with purple leaves as worked on a canvas slipper. Mrs. St. John's trouble was obviously of another kind.

"You're not just to Heathcote," she said unsteadily. "I'm sure he would do anything he could for us. It wasn't his fault that his horrid old uncle went bankrupt. And besides, what is he to do?" Her tone was at once aggressive and defensive. The

most casual observer would have discovered that she was desperately defending a criminal of whose innocence she herself was not at all convinced.

Mrs. Hamilton rose ponderously.

"My child, you are perfectly right to speak kindly of your husband," she said. "After all, he is your husband, for better or for worse. Alas, I fear it has been for the worse. If only you had listened to me! I always said that a man who polished his finger-nails would never do any good in the world."

"Mother!"

"Well, my dear, has he done any good? Has he done anything for you?"

The door opened at that moment and a prim-looking maid entered bearing a silver platter.

"If you please, ma'am, the letters."

She got no further. Mrs. St. John had crossed the room almost before the words were out of her mouth, and had snatched—no weaker word would describe the action—the two envelopes from the tray and borne them in triumph to the window. The first she dropped instantly.

"For you, mother."

"Well, my dear, you might at least bring it here! Really these London manners——"

She stopped short, for the very sufficient reason that there is no object in giving a lecture to deaf ears, however much one is inspired. With an expression of offended dignity on her round florid face, she composed herself to wait, at the same time

keeping a stern eye on her daughter, who by now had reached the second page of her letter. But Mrs. Hamilton was not fond of waiting, and the faint flush on the younger woman's face aroused her suspicions to an extent which made her forget that she was at that moment acting the part of the injured parent.

"Well, my dear?" she said, stiffly interrogative.

Mrs. St. John turned over the third page. Apparently she had not heard.

"Well, Cecilia?" This time there was considerable asperity in the high-pitched voice. Mrs. St. John smiled to herself. It was a peculiar, sweet smile, which, taken altogether with the heightened color, was altogether charming; but as neither had anything to do with her mother, the latter refused to be charmed.

"Cecilia!"

Cecilia looked up at last. Her eyes were sparkling, and the old look of listlessness had entirely vanished.

"Just think!" she exclaimed. "Heathcote has written to me—and he's very glad I wouldn't give up Archibald—and he's got some good position in some firm—and he's doing splendidly. There now!"

It must be regretfully admitted that her manner was neither filial nor very respectful—in fact, it was offensively triumphant; and Mrs. Hamilton stiffened with displeasure.

"I am delighted to hear it," she said. "Might

I inquire what firm has acquired the inestimable boon of your husband's services?"

Cecilia hesitated, and held the letter closer to the light.

"I can't quite make out the name; it looks like Jenkins and Jenkins, but I'm not sure," she said.

"And pray who are Jenkins and Jenkins? I have never heard of the firm before."

Her daughter smiled. Her smile was gently patronizing.

"Oh, but then you wouldn't, mother. You see, you don't live in London, and——"

"Have you ever heard of it?"

Cecilia wavered, looked at her mother, and then plunged boldly.

"Of course, I have. It's a very big firm."

"What of?"

"What of? Let me see—eh—solicitors, of course."

"That accounts for you knowing them so well," Mrs. Hamilton observed sarcastically. "I can imagine that Heathcote would be very useful in his new capacity—as office boy."

Mrs. St. John drew herself up to her full height. It was not a very great height, and it was wonderful what an amount of dignity she got out of it.

"Please, mother, remember you are speaking of my husband," she said. "You know perfectly well that Heathcote would never accept a subordinate position. And, anyhow, it's just as worthy to be an

office boy as a gardener." And with this concluding shot she made a triumphal exit, thereby cutting short her mother's retort which would have been finally crushing. Mrs. Hamilton—from long practise on her husband—was a past master in the art of "last words," and it annoyed her extremely that her daughter's premature retreat should have lost her such an admirable opportunity to display her powers. So she, too, flounced out of the room, and crossing the passage, entered her husband's sanctum. It should be remarked that the quiet, sunlit little den was only called "sanctum" by courtesy, for no place was sacred as far as Mrs. Hamilton was concerned, and her husband looked up from his paper with the resignation of despair. In the pulpit he was given to denouncing society with a tongue of fire and the village yokels consequently trembled before him as before the personification of everlasting damnation—but these awe-inspiring attributes were probably to be explained by the fact that in his own house he was a man of no importance whatever. At the present moment his expression betokened considerable uneasiness, as well it might do. In truth, the storm signals were flying, and, figuratively, he was preparing to take in sail with the utmost possible speed.

"Well, my dear, is there anything I can do for you?" he began, by way of breaking the first shock of the onslaught. Rather to his amazement, his wife's remark was apparently harmless.

"John, have you a London directory?"

"Certainly, my dear, up there on the third shelf."

"Please fetch it down."

He obeyed.

"Now look and see if there is a firm called Jenkins and Jenkins."

Mr. Hamilton fumbled with the pages for a considerable time, during which his wife showed increasing signs of exasperation. As a result, he grew nervous and flustered.

"Really, Jane, I don't know what Jenkins you mean," he stammered at last. "There are as many Jenkinses as there are fish in the ocean——"

"John, don't make silly similes, or metaphors, or whatever you call them. Is there a firm called Jenkins and Jenkins? Do try and be a little intelligent."

He tried, apparently with the same result, but presently his square finger stopped short on its travels down the columns.

"Here you are—'Jenkins and Jenkins, Harley Mews, cab owners.' My dear, what do you want with cab owners?"

"Nothing!" she retorted tartly. "I thought as much."

She sat down heavily, with her hands folded in her lap, and stared in front of her, apparently plunged in her own reflections. Her husband knew better than to disturb her, and he waited patiently for enlightenment. But it seemed that she had no

intention of enlightening. She merely fixed him with a stern and questioning eye.

"John, did you ever notice that Heathcote was a liar?"

"A liar? Really, my dear——" The Reverend Oscar Hamilton fidgeted uneasily. "'Pon my word —I never thought about such a thing!"

"Well, he is." She rose again in all the magnificence of righteous indignation. "I am truly thankful that poor Cecilia has come to us. At least we can save that child Archibald from his father's pernicious influence—if only the seeds of evil are not already sown."

Her husband actually forgot himself so far as to laugh.

"My dear, the little chap is as innocent as a——"

"John, you're going to make another simile. I have already found Archibald to be disobedient in the extreme. How many times, for instance, have I told him not to touch the strawberries, and——" She ended her sentence with a smothered scream. A grimy bearded face had risen above the window ledge, and two small eyes blinked ferociously from under the shaggy eyebrows. "David, what is the matter?" Mrs. Hamilton gasped with her hand on her heart. "You nearly gave me a stroke!"

David tugged at a gray forelock.

"If you please, ma'am, Master Archibald's at them there beds again," he drawled. "There ain't

no doin' anythin' with 'im. 'E's worse than a dozen spadgers, 'e is."

"Send Master Archibald to me at once. I shall speak most severely to him." Mrs. Hamilton turned to her husband triumphantly. "And now what have you to say?" she demanded.

But Mr. Hamilton retired behind his paper and said nothing.

CHAPTER XXV

A WIFE'S PLACE

IF necessity is the mother of invention, adversity is without doubt the mother of that and a good many other things besides, including a naughty undisciplined spirit with tendencies to deceit. Baby Archibald knew this, because he himself was a living testimony to the truth of the adage. He knew that he had the above described spirit because Mrs. Hamilton told him so regularly, and Mrs. Hamilton, as enjoying the respectable position of his grandmother, could not be mistaken. He knew, by a careful process of reasoning, that the spirit must be the result of his unhappiness, for he had never suffered from it before, having been adjudged "a good little chap" even by the butler, who was not given to laudatory criticism. True, he had not been particularly happy even in those Portman Square days, but at least he had been allowed to indulge in bear hunts and other equally sounding exploits. Here bear hunting was taboo. Mrs. Hamilton frankly did not understand its charm, and everybody from herself down to Archibald's natural enemy—the gardener—seemed to exist solely for the purpose of telling him the things he was not allowed to do. And the worst

was that his mother did not help him. She was very affectionate and tender, but in an absent-minded sort of way, as though she were always thinking of something else, and she proved wholly ineffectual as a source of protection. So Baby Archibald developed a naughty undisciplined spirit with a tendency to deceit, and went to the bad—chiefly among the strawberry beds. There were three reasons why the strawberry beds tempted him to his worst deeds, and two of the reasons were quite indefensible. The first was that he had never seen strawberries growing "alive" before—which excuse pardoned his first offense; the second, that he liked them above all earthly things, and the third—and worst—was that he knew that his inroads infuriated the gardener. The chronicler regrets to relate that it gave Archibald's small soul a wicked satisfaction to see David tearing his gray locks and muttering unintelligible profanities over a devastated bed. All of which proves that Baby Archibald was very far gone indeed along the broad road which leads to destruction.

On the particular afternoon on which Mrs. Hamilton had discovered that her son-in-law was a base deceiver her grandson did his best to prove the theory of hereditary wickedness by performing Homeric gastronomic feats among the ripest and finest specimens. Discovery was inevitable and imminent. Baby Archibald, feeling rather weary and depressed, heard David's growling voice denounc-

ing his misdeeds, and Mrs. Hamilton's shrill retort, and he prepared himself for flight. Besides the already described spirit, adversity had endowed him with a gift for strategy. As soon as he heard David's lumbering step along the gravel path Archibald crawled on all fours into the tool shed and hid himself behind a mowing machine. As a rule this place of refuge had proved entirely effectual; on this occasion David seemed possessed of a diabolical cunning.

"Come along out o' that, Master Archibald," he growled fiercely. "I saw ye, ye thievin' little varmint!"

The heavy footsteps drew nearer and Archibald's teeth began to chatter. If he had reasoned things out he would have known that there was nothing worse before him than a shaking and a long lecture on the evilness of his ways, but at Archibald's time of life reasoning is wholly subservient to imagination. If you realize that at that moment David had become a great, hungry, shaggy bear and Baby Archibald a bold hunter who had lost his gun, you will understand why the latter's teeth chattered, and why he struggled desperately to screw himself into nothing behind the rubbish at the back of the shed.

"Come along out o' it!" David repeated. "I sees ye!"

His shadow darkened the doorway. Baby Archibald gave a final desperate wriggle; there was a bursting, cracking sound and clatter of overturned

cans and rakes, and with a bump Baby Archibald found himself sitting in the middle of a quiet lane, decidedly shaken, but saved as by a miracle. The miracle was of a simple character. The back of the shed, which looked out on a road, had given way, and had precipitated the refugee into an unknown region of leafy trees and tall graceful ferns and lovely wild flowers which grew up in rich profusion under their shadow. Baby Archibald, who in all his sojourn at the manor had never been allowed to wander farther than the garden, believed himself to have been transported—rather roughly perhaps—into fairy-land. Consequently he felt not the slightest surprise when on scrambling to his knees he found himself face to face with a thick-set, square-jawed being who sat on the fallen trunk of a tree and mopped itself with a large handkerchief.

"Why, hallo, Goblin!" Baby Archibald exclaimed delightedly. "Oh, I am so glad!"

Of the two the goblin was decidedly the more surprised, but he recovered himself at once and raised his hat.

"Why, hello; Grass Orphan! Where did you spring from?"

"I didn't spring—I tumbled. Thank you very much."

"What for?"

"For bringing me here. I was so frightened."

"Oh, I brought you here, did I? H'm, yes,

of course. Well, what were you frightened of, eh?"

"David—he nearly caught me."

"He did?" The goblin stretched out a large hand, and picking up Baby Archibald with surprising ease by the belt, planted him on the trunk beside him. "Who's David, anyhow?" he asked.

Baby Archibald raised his gray eyes in grave disappointment.

"Don't you know?"

"Of course I know, young man. I only wanted to find out if you knew."

"David's the gardener," Archibald explained, not wholly satisfied. "He's horrid—he doesn't understand little boys, mother says."

"Stupid man! And he's horrid to you, eh?"

"He doesn't like me, you see, 'cause I take the strawberries."

"H'm! 'Take' is a nice word. I presume you like strawberries?"

"Yes, and they are so good for me." His tone was slightly defensive. "Mother told granny so. I s'pose mother knows, don't you?"

"I suppose so. Have you any doubts?"

"Sometimes I feel funny here." He put his hand thoughtfully to the region of his belt and the goblin chuckled diabolically.

"Don't wonder. Never mind, it's a good thing I came in time to let you out of that trap-door,

wasn't it? By the way, it's quite a time since our first meeting. What have you been doing with yourself?"

"Nothing, 'cept being un—unhappy."

"Nice occupation that—especially when varied with stealing—pardon, I mean taking strawberries. Well, I haven't been having a very nice time either. Do you know what I was doing just now?"

Baby Archibald shook his head.

"I was running away with myself—from a fairy."

"You!" Baby Archibald was surprised and shocked. "What fairy?"

"I suppose I had better explain, Grass Orphan. You see, it was like this. Once upon a time I offended this particular fairy. She was a rather lovely person, but you know what fairies are—once you put their back up they can never forgive you, and my fairy was the most unrelenting of the lot. You must understand that I was very fond of her, but she thought I was after her fairy castle like all the other goblins, and wouldn't have anything to do with me. It wasn't her fault altogether. There were other fairies who made mischief and told lies and made things horrid. There are fairies like that, you know."

"Oh, yes!" Baby Archibald's eyes brightened. "I 'spect granny is one."

"Dear me! She doesn't tell lies, I hope!"

"About father—lots."

"And you believe them?"

"'Course not. Nor does mother—but she cries." He sighed heavily. "She often cries now," he added.

The goblin rubbed his hands together and chuckled.

"That's first-rate. The charm's working."

"What charm?" Archibald demanded eagerly.

"Don't you remember? 'Pon my word, Grass Orphan, I believe you have forgotten."

"'Bout father and mother and me? No, I haven't; but I 'spected you had. You were so slow."

The goblin chuckled till his cheeks grew even redder than they were.

"Slow but sure, young man. Now come here, and I'll show you the fairy I was running away from."

With his big hand clasped round Baby Archibald's small and rather sticky one, he crept to the end of the lane, and crouched down behind a hedge, whence one could see the full length of the road which led to the station. Presently a one-horse shay came rumbling toward them, and the goblin gave his companion a dig in the ribs.

"There she is," he whispered.

Baby Archibald rubbed himself. It is not nice to have a dig in the ribs after you have been performing gastronomic feats among strawberry beds, but he was too excited to complain. After all, a real fairy is not to be met every day.

"Where—?" he whispered.

"There—in the cart, you young duffer! Don't you know a fairy when you see one?"

The shay rumbled past. Baby Archibald gave a sigh of disappointment. He had caught a glimpse of a parasol and a stern aristocratic-looking face and he felt that the goblin had been making fun of him.

"That wasn't a fairy!" he said. "That was Mrs. 'Chesney. She isn't a fairy."

"That's all you know about it. You don't suppose that fairies go about in spangles nowadays, do you? Police wouldn't let them. That's why I had to give up my tail and take to these things." He indicated his attire with a disgusted finger. "But you can take my word for it that Mrs. Deschesney is a fairy right enough. She has a golden wand with which she can do everything—at least she thinks she can—and she has come down here to spoil my charm. She doesn't really want to, but she believes she does, which comes to the same thing. When you grow up, young man, you will remember that fairies are the most contrary things on earth. They don't know what they want themselves, but there's a devil of a fuss if you don't know. Anyhow, I'm here to stop this one, and to prove to her that her golden wand isn't everything. And you've got to help me, Grass Orphan."

"Me?" Baby Archibald's eyes were wide with excitement.

"Yes, you. You've got to take this letter to your mother at once. I had meant to give it to her myself, but I didn't know the fairy was on my track, and I'm frightened. Now run, little chap, as fast as ever you can."

Baby Archibald clasped the square envelope, and then he felt himself being swept up into the air and over the hedge into the familiar garden. The next instant he was scampering over the strawberry beds as fast as a pair of short, none too steady legs could carry him. Fortunately, David was not there to witness this culminating crime against his protégés, and Archibald reached the drawing-room unhindered. Fortunately, too, he did not stop to listen, for if he had he would have undoubtedly turned back. As it was he pushed his way through the heavy curtains, and then waited, not knowing what to do, and feeling rather frightened.

Mrs. Deschesney sat by the window with her gloved hands folded uncompromisingly over the handle of her parasol. In spite of her decided expression, Baby Archibald, in the light of his new knowledge, saw that she had undoubtedly fairy-like characteristics. There was, for instance, a lacy daintiness about her dress which betrayed her, only the golden wand was missing. Baby Archibald supposed she had it up her sleeve.

"You see, I am quite determined," she was saying. "I quite understand your feelings, but you

must see for yourself that things can not go on like this. I do not want to be brutal, but another one thousand pounds should really prove to you how mistaken you are in not giving yourselves and the boy a chance. And besides—" She looked round the old-fashioned, hopelessly inartistic room with a faint disparagement. "As I know you, Cecilia, you won't stand this sweet simplicity more than a fortnight."

Mrs. Hamilton, who reclined on the plush sofa, raised her eyebrows in displeasure.

"I do not see why Cecilia should not be perfectly happy in her old home," she said stiffly. "She has everything she can possibly want. I do not at all hold with the wasteful luxury—"

"And, anyhow, there is no need to talk any more about it," her daughter interrupted. "I have just heard from Heathcote, Adelaide, and he says that he has an excellent position, and no doubt as soon as he has got everything ready for us the baby and I will return to him."

"I don't believe a word of it!" Mrs. Hamilton broke in. "Heathcote is simply humbugging you. What respectable firm would give him an excellent position pray? He knows nothing, and is nothing but a—"

"Mother, I will not have my husband spoken of like that!" Mrs. St. John rose and faced her mother with fiery indignation. "I have the greatest confidence in Heathcote. I shall go home to him at

once. I can not stand it any longer. A wife's place is at her husband's side—"

Mrs. Deschesney gave an annoyed laugh.

"Really, Cecilia, what a dreadful platitude! And suppose your place, as you call it, were in a back alley, would you still be of that opinion?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that at the present moment Heathcote is driving a hansom cab for the cab owners, Jenkins and Jenkins. It may be an excellent position. It has at least the advantage of being very original."

Mrs. St. John sat down as suddenly as she had got up. All the color had gone out of her cheeks.

"It's not true!" she said faintly.

"My dear, it's perfectly true. He drove me to the station the other day, and I had an argument with him about the fare. He didn't know I recognized him, but I did."

Mrs. Hamilton threw up her hands.

"How dreadful!" she exclaimed with extreme satisfaction. "I thought as much. You see, Cecilia—"

"Don't!" Mrs. St. John clasped her hands together in an agony of humiliation and despair. "How could he have done such a thing? How could he!"

There was a moment's silence. Mrs. Deschesney's face was twisted into an expression which was a strange mingling of satisfaction, disappointment, amusement and disgust.

"At any rate, you see there is nothing to expect from that quarter," she said at last. "I don't want to press you, Cecilia, but really, if you want to save the situation, there is nothing for it but for you to accept my offer. Mrs. Smythe has already seen your husband, and the scandal—"

"I shall never forgive him!" Mrs. St. John interrupted wildly. "Never! And I shall never go back to him!" At that moment her eye chanced to fall on Baby Archibald, who in his perplexity was trying to balance on one leg and failing disastrously. "Come here, Archibald," she said. "What are you doing there? And what have you got in your hand?"

He came forward shyly, keeping a wide berth between his grandmother and himself and a watchful eye on Mrs. Deschesney, whom he knew to be capable of anything.

"It's a letter for you, mother," he said.

"Who gave it to you?"

"A gob—a person, mother."

"Don't be silly, Archibald! Give it me."

He obeyed and she tore the letter open impatiently. The next moment she was on her feet, her eyes wide open with alarm.

"It's from a friend of my husband!" she said jerkily. "He says Heathcote has been very ill—a bad cold and the night air—he never did wrap up properly. Oh, what shall I do!"

Mrs. Deschesney looked indifferent. Mrs. Ham-

ilton made a sound which in vulgar circles would have been called a sniff.

"I have really no idea," she said. "A man who degrades himself and his whole family by taking a low position—"

"It isn't a low position; it's as good as strawberry beds, anyhow. I must go to him at once. There is a train in half an hour. Adelaide, you will take me in your carriage, won't you?"

"No. I won't!" Mrs. Deschesney was really very angry, and Baby Archibald fully expected the golden wand to appear and turn his mother into a cabbage or something equally unattractive. But instead the hard face relaxed unwillingly. "I suppose, I must," Mrs. Deschesney said. "You are perfectly mad, Cecilia, but I suppose it must be in the family."

"It is nothing of the sort!" Mrs. Hamilton rose indignantly and prepared to follow her daughter out of the room. "At least not on my side!" And with this Parthian shot at her absent husband she sailed off in all the majesty of righteous anger.

Baby Archibald lingered a moment. He looked up at Mrs. Deschesney, and Mrs. Deschesney looked down at him, and there was a moment's awkward silence.

"Well," she said at last. "What is it?"

"I was wondering about your golden wand," he said, with his head a little on one side. "Didn't you want to use it, or couldn't you?"

"What golden wand, you absurd little boy?"

"The gob—somebody told me you had a golden wand, which you thought could make everybody do what you wanted," he explained. "But he said it couldn't, and it can't, can it?"

Mrs. Deschesney turned away. Her expression was grim.

"Whoever your 'somebody' is, he must be an extremely foolish person," she said.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE MAN ON THE BOX

HEATHCOTE ST. JOHN was trying to shave himself. If you have been accustomed to a French valet who rejoices in the name of Charles, it is a serious business to undertake such a task by yourself. Add on the discomforts of a back room in a back alley with a slanting roof, no light to speak of and a broken mirror, and the task becomes almost impossible. Heathcote cut himself twice before he at length succeeded, and then he sat down on the chair and waited for his temper to come back. That took about five minutes and then he went on, patiently carrying about the remnant of his glass from one side of the attic to another in the endeavor to make the most of what little light came through the tiny window. Now and again he stopped to look at himself with a sort of objective interest. The change in him was of a remarkable though subtle kind. He was thinner—almost haggard; there was not an ounce of superfluous flesh anywhere about him, and his hands, which he examined with a rueful grimace, were red with work.

But the greater change lay in his expression. The

eyes were alert and keen-looking, the well-cut lips had learned to close themselves in a line of decision and energy, and he held himself erect. The old languid indifference, the air of almost stupid good nature, the stooping gait, had vanished. In a word, the dandy had become a man of action, though he had not left his dandyism wholly behind him. Indeed, he took the usual care of his tie, and was extraordinarily particular as to the spotless condition of his sporting coat. The latter had a tin disk fastened in the buttonhole, which disk announced that the owner was number 3505 and seemed to cause Heathcote a certain amount of grim amusement. He arranged it at all sorts of different position, he took a top hat from a box under the trundle-bed, brushed it carefully and donned it at a somewhat rakish angle.

"I'd like to see the old lady who'd resist me now!" he said with a boyish chuckle.

"If you please, sir, tea is ready!"

Heathcote opened the door, and shook his finger threateningly.

"Tilda, if you call me 'sir' again something awful will happen to you. I'm coming in a moment."

He went back to the table, and snatching up a letter thrust it in his pocket and ran down the rickety stairs after Tilda's disappearing figure. He reached the Jenkins parlor almost at the same time as she did, and burst into the tiny room like a storm of March wind.

"Now then, Mother Jenkins, give me a cup of something, quick! The horse is waiting, and I've got ten bob to make before midnight. H'm, you can cook, mother!"

"Lor' sir, that ain't nothin'. A cup 'o tea's easy to make."

"Oh, is it? Then I wonder why my one hundred pound cook couldn't manage it? But now I must be off. Good-by, mother, and pray for me that I don't run over a policeman."

Tilda followed him down-stairs. She was, if possible, a shade more disorderly than in her Portland Square days, but her plain face radiated an entirely new expression of intelligence.

"Please, have you 'eard, sir?" she asked timidly, as she stood at his side in the yard and watched him as he drew on his driving gloves. "I 'ope you'll forgive me, sir, but I'm that anxious."

"No, I've not heard," Heathcote answered, too absorbed to notice the offending title. "And you needn't mind asking me. Since you and your people have been so kind to me you've a right to know my affairs—you especially. You're a first-rate pal, and a sort of guardian angel all wrapped up in one parcel, Tilda, and I'm awfully grateful. Here, do help do up this confounded glove, will you?"

Tilda obeyed, her clumsy fingers struggling desperately with a refractory button and buttonhole.

"And you've written to her, sir?"

"Yes, I wish to Heaven I hadn't. I suppose by

this time she has found out that her husband is a shocking liar and has given him the final go-by. If my respected mother-in-law has a word to say in the matter, it's sure. The Hamiltons never had a cabby in their family, and they don't want to begin now."

"But what lies?" demanded Tilda, plunging at the root of the business and tearing off a button.

"Tilda, you're no good as a valet, I'm afraid. My dear, it was what you ladies call 'a white lie.' I told her I had a splendid position—and so I have—from my point of view, and considering what a hopeless ass I am, but she won't think so. My reasons for so lying are complicated; you'd have to be rather hard hit to understand them. Partly I didn't want her to worry about me, but the chief reason was—well, I didn't want her to know what an—an infernal failure her husband is—That's all right, Mr. Jenkins, I'm ready."

The last remark was addressed to a burly individual in shirt-sleeves who appeared, leading a horse out of the stables. By a certain vagueness in his expression, and an absence of any decided feature in his face, he was easily to be recognized as Tilda's father.

"'Ere you are, mister. I've given you my Bess to-night. She's my best 'oss wot I don't let no one drive but myself, but I knows you're a gent wot understands 'orse-flesh, so I trusts you."

"That's good of you, Mr. Jenkins. I hope Bess will bring me luck."

With a briskness which would have surprised himself a few weeks before, Heathcote set about harnessing the horse to the waiting hansom, and five minutes later, amid admiring "Ohs" and "Ahs" from the ostlers, he drove out of the Mews and waved a last farewell before he turned into the street.

Five minutes later Heathcote was walking his horse along Baker Street. In spite of his jaunty get-up he was feeling depressed and miserable. There were many reasons therefor quite apart from the dull grayness of the evening. In the first place his recent interview with Miss Elizabeth Jones had left a very painful impression. It is not a pleasant business to knock one's self headlong off one's pedestal, especially when one has been feeling comfortable on that elevation. It is not pleasant to realize that in spite of this act of abnegation one's conscience is still burdened with the breakage of an innocent feminine heart or that one has been criticizing one's wife for very much the same crime as committed on an equally innocent musician. Figuratively Heathcote was undergoing a "cure" diet of dust and ashes.

And there were other reasons for his depression. He was feeling very much alone and deserted. Nobody believed in him any more with the exception of the trusting Tilda, and in his pocket, stamped and

addressed to one Mrs. Heathcote St. John was a confession which would cast him forever into utter darkness. His surmise at Mrs. St. John's action on receipt of the missive did not tend to console him. Not that she would not be perfectly in her rights. He was without doubt a hopeless failure, and he would never attempt to hold her to him, but—but he wished to Heaven that things had been different, that he had made his own way from the beginning, that his uncle had never been born; finally that he had not fallen in love with his wife just when he was on the point of losing her. The last thought made him wince. It had almost come as a revelation to him—his falling in love with a woman he had imagined he had loved for years. It was as though he had learned to know the depth of things for the first time—when it was too late.

A shrill whistle startled him from his reflections, and instinctively he turned into Portland Square. It gave him a feeling of ironical amusement to find that the call came from a few doors of his own house, now empty and adorned with the ambiguous sign "sold." He looked up at the blank windows and wondered if the next owner would be such a fool as he had been. Consequently, he nearly forgot his prospective fare—an old lady who stood on the pavement and stared first at him and then at his horse.

"Cabman, is your animal quiet?"

"Yes, ma'am, quiet as a lamb."

"I don't like the way it looks at me."

"It won't be able to see you when you're inside, ma'am."

She shook her head.

"If you're very careful, I'll give you twopence for yourself when we get to Waterloo," she said.

Heathcote smacked his lips vulgarly.

"If you bribe me like that I'll run over a policeman for you," he retorted.

He was almost as good as his word, for he went on thinking about his wife, which accounted for several wrong turnings and several more narrow shaves. The old lady inside protested more than once through the medium of her umbrella, which, appearing through the trap-door, missed Heathcote's eye by a bare inch. But Heathcote was in an unrelenting mood and went on recklessly, reaching Waterloo in what must have been record time.

"It's disgraceful!" his employer gasped as she scrambled out on the pavement. "I was never so frightened in all my life. Of course, you're drunk. It's no use denying it. I can see it in your eye. If I did my duty I should take your number. Porter, take my bag at once!"

"And my twopence!" said Heathcote ruefully.

But the old lady was evidently too upset to remember such a detail as the fare, and she lost herself in the crowd, leaving Heathcote to the jeers of a superior taxi-man who had just grazed his off-wheel.

"Get along with your old clothes-horse!" the latter observed rudely. "This ain't no pageant for the Middle Hages, Noah!"

Heathcote raised his hat with irreproachable politeness but he did not "get along." He remained obstinately glued to the curb and watched the crowd which streamed out of the station, gloomily noting how his more modern rivals whirled off with the pick of the flock. And then suddenly a familiar voice fell on his ears and he sat up in his box as though he had received the full contents of an electric battery.

"No, Cecilia, I won't have a taxi. I don't like them. I'm old-fashioned and I like to know exactly what is happening to me. With these newfangled machines one can't possibly tell. Now, here's a very nice-looking horse. Cabman!"

Heathcote looked down out of the corner of his eyes and kept his perch with a great effort. It was Mrs. Deschesney, his wife—and Baby Archibald.

"Yes, ma'am," he said faintly, and thanked Heaven for dusk. "Where to, ma'am?"

"First to—Portland Square."

"Yes, ma'am."

There was no need for him to try to disguise his voice—it was hoarse with horror—and for the next five minutes his thoughts were in a state which might be mildly described as chaotic. Indeed, it seemed to him that only a miracle could have brought them safely out of the crowded station, and had it

not been for the knowledge that the cab contained all that was dear to him he would probably have lost what little presence of mind was left him and driven into the first motor-bus. As it was, he turned into the quieter streets, and hoped at least Bess would have sense enough to keep them from disaster.

Then he tried to think clearly. The whole thing was too impossible—too awful. He began to wonder if the old lady had been right, and if he were really drunk or dreaming. To make sure, he lifted the trap-door cautiously, and peeped down. He caught a glimpse of his wife's hat, the tip of her nose, and a stray curl belonging to Baby Archibald, who was apparently fast asleep, and the sight gave him such a peculiar thrill of pleasure that he looked again, and was caught in the act.

"What's the matter, cabman?" Mrs. Deschesney asked sharply.

"Nothing, ma'am. I was only looking to see if—if you were still there," was the feeble answer, and the trap-door went down with a bang.

"The man's mad," said Mrs. Deschesney.

The "man" thought so himself. Or if he was not mad, he stood before a most horrible, or, what was worse, a most ludicrous situation. It was clear to him that his wife had received his letter, and, encouraged by the "splendid situation," had come back to London to take up her old place in the world. He had deceived her, and she was going to find him out, in an hour, or perhaps sooner, as a failure

who had burlesqued a success, a useless creature who had sunk to the bottom of the social scale. It was true—he had meant to confess to her; but it is one thing to make a dignified confession and another to be found out *in flagrante delicto*. Undoubtedly, she would despise him—or laugh at him. The thought was intolerable. By the time he had reached Portland Square he was ready to forsake his post and make a dash for liberty. But escape was impossible. Mrs. Deschesney descended the step with a dignity marked by displeasure.

"I hope you will never regret it, Cecilia," she said severely. "At any rate, remember that my offer is still open to you. Good night!"

"Good night, Adelaide!"

The trap-door was then pushed up by a dainty gloved hand, which Heathcote had much ado not to seize hold of. He was torn between a wild delight and a horrible sense of coming catastrophe. He felt he never could let her go again, and he wished the earth would open and swallow him up.

"Cabby!"

"Yes, ma'am?"

"I want you to take me to a shop."

"Eh—what sort of a shop?"

"Oh, you know—where you can buy everything, food and wine, and cigars and clothes."

"A—a stores, ma'am?"

"Yes, that will do."

Heathcote turned his horse slowly round. At any

rate this was a reprieve. Perhaps at the shop she would dismiss him, and then at least he would escape the full humiliation of his discovery. The hope buoyed him up but was doomed to destruction. Mrs. Heathcote St. John merely nodded at him as she left the cab.

"You'll wait there, cabman."

"Yes, ma'am."

He caught a glimpse of her upturned face, and for no particular reason lost his nerve completely. No sooner had she disappeared behind the glass doors than he whipped up his horse and swerved wildly out of the big thoroughfare into a side street. An enraged policeman shouted all the anathemas of the law after him, he narrowly escaped a coster's cart, but he never drew rein until three miles lay between him and his avenging fate. Then he pulled up and allowed his panting horse breathing space and himself a moment's thought. Obviously the first thing his wife would do would be to go to the poste restante address he had given her, and obviously the best thing he could do would be to get there first and leave his miserable confession to await her arrival. Afterward he would disappear quietly from her horizon. It was the only reparation he could make her. He was about to act on the idea when a stiff-looking gentleman of military aspect hailed him from the curb. Heathcote struggled against a strong inclination to make off a second time, but the reflection that he had not earned a penny so far

brought him to his senses. After all, the job might be a short one, and, as he knew his wife, she would be in the stores at least an hour. He would have time and to spare.

"Yes, sir?"

"Drive me to Euston as quickly as you can." The military gentleman put his foot on the step and then fell back on the pavement. "You silly fool! Why didn't you tell me you were engaged?"

"I'm—what?"

"Engaged, you jackass!"

Heathcote opened the trap-door and peeped in. Then he sat back with a gasp.

"Good lord!" he said. "I had forgotten!"

The family Jenkins were at supper when the door opened suddenly and Heathcote stood on the threshold. He was very pale, his hat was at the back of his head, his tie under one ear, and in his arm he held a bundle wrapped in a horse-rug.

"Save me, hide me, bury me, do something with me!" he said. "By this time the law's after me—I've kidnaped my own son!"

CHAPTER XXVII

ONLY MARRY ME

"NUMBER 4760 Paddington."

"Number what—?"

"4760 Paddington."

"All right—wait a moment."

Pause. Mrs. Deschesney frowned round the handsome library and amused herself in the interval by playing nervously with a paper-knife. Then the telephone bell rang again.

"Is that Greene and Greene?"

"Yes."

"Here is Mrs. Deschesney, of Portland Square. I want to speak with Mr. Samuels at once."

"Mr.—who?"

"Samuels."

Pause.

"Sorry, but no one of that name in the office."

"Nonsense, think again. Samuels—S-a-m-u-e-l-s, a short heavy-looking man with an ugly face."

"Sorry. Would Jones do? Answers to the description—"

Mrs. Deschesney rang off. She was very angry, and she was just on the point of sitting down to write an indignant note to the head of the office to com-

plain of the impertinence of its subordinates when a discreet cough drew her attention to the fact that she was no longer alone. She turned round with a start and found a short heavy-looking man with an ugly face seated in her favorite chair and smiling affably at her.

"Jeremy—Mr. Harris—Mr. Samuels, whatever are you doing there, and how did you get in?" she demanded with the icy calm of a person who feels that she has reached the limit of all things. Mr. Samuels' expression remained irrepressibly amiable.

"At present I am innocently doing nothing," he said. "I came in by the usual entrance—the door—and if you didn't hear my knock it was because you were talking too loudly down the telephone. It's a bad habit of yours, Adelaide. You should remember that distinctness, not noise—"

Mrs. Deschesney waved her hand.

"Thank you. I have managed to make myself intelligible through a telephone for a considerable number of years without advice and I hope to continue successfully to the end. All the same, I am glad you've come. As I suppose you heard, I have been inquiring for you at Greene and Greene's."

"I heard you asking for a short heavy-looking man with an ugly face, I can not believe that you meant me."

"The fact remains. Curiously, however, the firm did not even seem to know of your existence. Perhaps you can explain."

Mr. Samuels looked blank.

"I can't," he said.

"And yet you were in and out of the St. Johns' house for about a fortnight in the capacity of one of Greene and Greene's valuers. Really, Jer—Mr. Samuels!"

"I have nothing to be ashamed of," he protested doggedly.

"You were there under false pretenses?"

"Yes—no—well, not exactly."

"Don't make matters worse." She looked at him with crushing disparagement. "It makes my blood run cold to think of it. You might have stolen something."

"I might—in fact—" His small deep-set eyes wandered nervously round the room. "I did."

"You what?"

He fumbled in his coat pocket and drew out a little packet in tissue-paper, which he began to unwrap with an almost reverent care.

"You remember that the St. Johns had a little curio-case where they used to keep all sorts of more or less valuable odds and ends," he said. "The fellow who bought up their house and goods bought the case, too, and—well, I thought he wouldn't miss it. It hasn't much value."

"Show it to me!"

He came over to her side and put something that glittered on the library table. She looked at it closely, frowning, and then up into his grave face.

"I—I seem to remember it," she said.

"Yes, it was our engagement ring. I wondered if you would remember." She made no answer, but held the quaintly-shaped emerald in the palm of her hand, and he went on quietly. "When you gave it back to me I was feeling too bitter to think much what I was doing. I sent it to Heathcote's father as a curio. A few weeks ago when I saw it again I was sorry. I wanted it. You see, I am going back to my old haunts, the gold-fields, and—"

"You have an appointment?" she interrupted.

"Yes—not a bad one. But it is a desolate place. I wanted to take something with me that would remind me. I am not young enough to look much into the future, Adelaide. A man of forty-five must content himself with the past."

"I—ought to give you up to the police," she said.

"Will you? After all, it is a very little thing, and I was tempted."

"Nonsense! You are trying to make me believe you still care—" She rose almost violently, and her voice shook. "I suppose you have realized that my income has increased year by year!" she lashed out at him.

He nodded.

"I calculated that it would. You live very quietly, considering."

"You are at least frank!"

"My dear Adelaide, you know the working of

the human heart too well for me to attempt to impose on you."

"Is that sarcasm?"

"Surely not."

She sat down again and composed herself with an effort.

"We have wandered from the point," she said. "When you came I was trying to find out who wrote that letter to Mrs. St. John. Whoever he was, he could not have been a very respectable person. In the first place, the letter was anonymous—"

"Always a bad sign," Mr. Samuels put in.

"In the second place, it contained a most impertinent lie. There is nothing the matter with Heathcote, and there never will be. He has the constitution of an ostrich."

"Happy man!"

"When I began my search," Mrs. Deschesney went on without regarding the interruption, "I made up my mind that I had to look for some one who had not the slightest respect for the truth. That made the search difficult. If it had been the other way round, the number of possible culprits would have been more limited. However I presume there is no necessity for my looking any further?"

Mr. Samuels bowed.

"You wrote the letter?"

"Guilty."

"There was no stamp or postmark on it. How did you send it?"

"By the grass orphan—Archibald, I mean."

"Where were you then?"

"Hiding behind a hedge."

A spasm passed over Mrs. Deschesney's features.

"You have no dignity, Jeremy," she said in a muffled voice.

"I never had, Adelaide."

"Don't call me Adelaide. Remember, I may still send for the police. Now go on. Why did you tell Cecilia that dreadful nonsense about Heathcote's being at death's door?"

"Well, it's a kind of gamble. You see, I guessed that you'd come down with your extra one thousand pounds and the story of Heathcote's cab-driving exploits, and I had to do something to counterbalance it. It was a risky bit of business—but I am accustomed of taking risks. As it happens—I won!"

"That remains to be seen. You are sentimental, Jeremy. You always were, and you attach an absurd value to sentiment. I admit that you showed some perspicacity in sending that false alarm at the critical moment; but you are a fool to count on lasting effects. Do you really suppose that Cecilia will stand life in Harley Mews for an hour—especially when she finds that she has been outrageously hoaxed?"

Mr. Samuels took out his watch.

"According to your theory, she ought to be leaving now," he said.

"I am expecting her every minute," Mrs. Deschesney retorted.

"Shall we wait twenty minutes, and then go round and see what is happening?" he suggested.

Mrs. Deschesney shrugged her shoulders.

"You take a great interest in the affair," she said. "A man in your condition—"

"Fallen condition," he put in. "I know you are longing to say it, and my feelings are accustomed to being hurt."

"Very well. In your fallen condition you ought to have something better to do than to run round after other people's affairs."

"After all, Heathcote is my nephew," he protested.

"I should not mention the relationship if I were in your place. He has no great reason for feeling much affection for you."

"You think not? He owes me a great deal."

"Indeed! Allow me to tell you that I consider the allowance you gave him was an absurdity—a downright crime. A young man like that ought to have to make his way himself. Your money ruined them both. Believe me, Heathcote is a changed man since your precious money was lost, and I should not be surprised if in this present misfortune those two did not come together—Jeremy, what are you laughing at?"

"I'm not laughing. I was calculating that if you

went up-stairs to put on your bonnet you might be ready to start at the end of half an hour."

"I shall do nothing of the kind. I repeat—what does it matter to you whether Cecilia stands by her husband or not?"

He got up and faced her with a new gravity.

"It matters everything—to us both," he said. "We are both playing a last desperate game for the theories on which we have built our lives. One of them is going to be proved to-night and one of us has to admit that he or she has made a—muddle of things. If I'm the loser, I'll clear out, and I won't worry you again. If I win—"

"Well?"

"I shall expect you to take this back."

He held out the emerald ring, and she stood holding the edge of the table, with her eyes fixed on his immovable face.

"Jeremy, you must be mad," she stammered.

"No, I am not—or if I am to-night will prove it. My dear, it's no use pretending you don't care. People of our caliber care once and for always. I offer you nothing, and I shall not ask you to give up all your money to a dog's home to prove my disinterestedness. I only ask that you should trust me, and marry me."

"Only!" she echoed, with biting sarcasm.

"Yes, 'only.' There is nothing difficult or unpleasant about it, and at the bottom you know you want to."

She shook her head at him.

"Your audacity, or madness or whatever it is, makes me perfectly speechless," she said.

"Then it has had the desired effect. Suppose you go and see about that bonnet?"

"I shall do nothing—"

"Please!"

She considered him for a moment in silence.

"Jeremy," she said, "you are without doubt the plainest man I have ever had the misfortune to meet —in fact, you are so plain that you're almost attractive. You may telephone for a cab."

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE REAL THING

A CURIOUS procession made its way up the Jenkins narrow stairs. Tilda went as advance-guard with a candle lifted well above her head for the benefit of her followers, who stumbled cautiously after her; then came Mrs. Jenkins, breathing hard with the unaccustomed exertion; Heathcote, with the bundle in the horse-rug, came third; Mr. Jenkins, still in his shirt-sleeves, and as taciturn as ever, brought up the rear. Except for Mrs. Jenkins' breathing difficulties and the squeaking of Mr. Jenkins' boots, there was a profound hush. Once or twice, when the breathing and the squeaking grew too pronounced, Tilda glanced back reproachfully over her shoulder, and the two culprits rolled their eyes and screwed up their mouths to testify that they were quite aware of the solemnity of the occasion. On the landing a halt was called. The procession formed round Tilda, who had taken up the position of general manager quite as a matter of course, and apparently looked upon her previous acquaintance with the bundle in the horse-rug as a reason for bullying every one else.

"Now, you go on, mother," she said. "Father you're blocking the door. 'Ere Mr. 'Eathcote, I'll lead the way."

She entered the little room, and Heathcote followed her, treading on tiptoe as though afraid of waking his small burden. Next his own trundle-bed against the wall, Tilda had erected a long box-like concern, which was to serve the new arrival as sleeping accommodation, and a cup of milk stood waiting on the unsteady little table.

"It's for the hangel when 'e wakes hup," Mrs. Jenkins explained in a self-satisfied whisper. "'E'll want his supper bad, poor babby. And after that long journey, too!"

Very carefully and tenderly Heathcote laid his stolen possession on the improvised bed and watched with admiring eye as Tilda deftly removed the small shoes and stockings from the tired feet. It was remarkable how swift and gentle the clumsy hands could be. The scared bemuddled scullery maid from Portland Square had become a person of resource.

"Why, Tilda, I hardly know you!" Heathcote whispered. "You're a perfect miracle!"

A broad smile relaxed the intent face. She had just pulled the quilt over Baby Archibald's shoulders and now stood back to admire the full effect of her arrangements.

"It makes a difference when you 'aven't got a dozen folk a-sittin' on your 'ead," she observed

wisely. "That cook of yours, she sent me 'alf crazy, Mr. 'Eathcote!"

"It shan't happen again," he whispered back. "If ever I do rise to having a cook of my own again, you shall choose her, Tilda."

There was silence while the cortége stood round the sleeping Baby Archibald and wondered. Mrs. Jenkins had already expressed her opinion more than once, "There never 'ad been such a beautiful child before," and the same remark was now written all over her face. Even her husband, in defiance of his objecting boots, had ventured to draw nearer, and stood gazing down in absorbed interest.

"If that there kid were mine, I should send for a doctor," he burst out so abruptly that there was a general start. "I don't fancy 'is color—'tain't natural like."

"Get along, Samuel!" Mrs. Jenkins retorted. "Wot d'yer know about children? You don't know a pretty pink, 'ealthy complexion from measles, and that's the truth. You can go and look after your 'osses, man!"

Mr. Jenkins retired, offended.

"I've said my say, any'ow," he was heard to grumble from the doorway. "'Tain't natural."

Heathcote looked anxiously at Tilda.

"You don't think—?" he began.

"Not a bit of it, sir. 'E's as right as a trivet," came the reassuring answer. She put the candle behind the looking-glass, so that the light should

not fall on the sleeper. "Won't you come down for a bit of supper, sir?"

"No, thanks, Tilda. I'd rather stay up here. He might be frightened if he woke up here alone."

"All right, sir. I'll bring you up a bit of something warm."

The door closed softly, and he heard the creaking of the stairs as the two kindly women crept down to the little parlor beneath. He was glad they had gone. He wanted to have his son all to himself, to look after him. It gave him a sense of proprietorship such as he had never had before, and had never wanted to have. He no longer felt so intensely alone. Very quietly he placed his chair at the foot of the makeshift bed, and with his chin supported in his hand, watched and waited. As his eyes became accustomed to the half-darkness he began to distinguish the baby features more clearly. It was almost as though he looked at his own son for the first time. He began to see that the small flushed face was more than a face—it was the index to an unknown, mysteriously developing character which yet had its roots, its very source in him—and in one other. The thought caused him a shock that was half painful, half joyful. He realized that here lay the mighty link between them, a being that was part her, part himself. The signs of their union were written on the face where, for the first time, he recognized his own features—and hers. His memory, stirred by the resemblance, painted her for

him in vivid colors standing beside the bed as she had done on that first night when the catastrophe had broken over them. It was curious that he had begun to reckon his life from that hour. All that had gone before was vague and unreal, as though it concerned another man. He had begun to live and love when he had begun to struggle and to suffer. As he sat there his thoughts wandered back irresistibly to his wife. He wondered what she was doing, what she was feeling. He had left messages at the police station, at his poste restante address, and had sent round to Mrs. Deschesney—but as yet no answer had come. He imagined her wandering distracted along the crowded streets, and his whole heart went out to her in helpless pity and love. He cursed himself as the unwilling cause of all her sorrows. She was not made to be unhappy, and he had made her so simply because he was a fool, a good-for-nothing. He was still seeking vainly for epithets to hurl at his own head when Baby Archibald stirred restlessly and groaned. The groan sent a thrill of nameless alarm through Heathcote's wearied nerves. In an instant he was bending over the child.

"Halloo, Archie!" he whispered.

The boy's eyes opened, and smiled with a recognition that was yet veiled with pain.

"Hello, father! Where's mummy?"

"She's—she's out. She'll be back soon."

"That's all right." He wriggled uncomfortably. "We were coming home, you know. Is this home?"

Heathcote bit his lips.

"Yes."

"It looks jolly—there ought to be lots of bears. Is mummy coming very soon?"

"Y—es. I hope so."

"I've got such a pain." He looked up into his father's face, his own small features twisted into an expression which threatened tears. Heathcote paled visibly. He had never had a pain in his life. Horrible visions of internal complications, appendicitis, operations, deaths and burials rose up before his mental vision.

"Where is it, little chap?" he asked tremulously.

"It's everywhere," came back the equally unsteady answer.

"You're quite sure it's not here—where I'm pressing?"

"No—it's everywhere." A long lugubrious sniff.

Heathcote stood upright, and ran his shaking hand over his forehead. A pain that was everywhere went beyond his medical wisdom. If only Cecilia would come! If only he were not so horribly alone and helpless!

"Archie!" he said.

"Y-e-s."

"Are you very hot?"

"Boilin'."

"Does your—let me see—does your throat hurt you?"

"Dunno. I 'spect so." A pause, and then—"I want my mother!" in loud dolorous accents.

"You shall have her in a minute," Heathcote

said soothingly. The full realization of his own uselessness was beginning to dawn on him. Even his son turned from him in moments of distress. He was, without doubt, a burden on the earth's surface. Archibald tossed in feverish restlessness.

"I want the goblin," he muttered feebly.

"The what?"

"The goblin. He'd put me right. Father, do ask him to come! It's such a pain!"

Heathcote groaned aloud. The child was evidently in a raging delirium. Not a moment was to be lost. He ran to the door, and tore it open.

"Cecilia!" he gasped.

Mrs. St. John entered. She was carrying a tray, and her sleeves were rolled up to the elbow.

"I have brought you your supper, Heathcote," she said calmly. "Tilda didn't want me to but I thought you'd like it."

"When did you come?" he asked. He was holding to the edge of the table for support, wondering whether he was mad or whether the old lady's diagnosis had been right after all. His wife set down the tray and looked at him. In the dim light he saw that she was pale—almost as though she had been crying; but there was laughter twinkling in her eyes.

"About half an hour ago," she said. "My boxes are coming by express delivery. Tilda is going to make up a bed for me in the attic." She put her head a little on one side. "You look quite nice in

your shirt-sleeves, Heathcote," she observed critically, "but not very clean. Can one get a bath here?"

"No—eh—yes—that is to say, there is a pump in the yard. Cecilia—how did you come here—how did you know?"

"I knew all along," she answered. "Mrs. Deschesney told me. Besides, I recognized you. It was too funny being driven home by one's own husband. But you shouldn't have run away like that—and without your fare, too! I think it was positively illegal."

"Why did you come?" he demanded hoarsely.

"Why, dear, if you ask so many questions, I shall begin to think that you are not pleased to see me. I came because I received a letter saying that you were ill. Did you write it?"

"Cecilia, you might give me some credit! I wrote you a lot of lies, but I've never whined for pity!"

"Well, then some one whined for you. Who was it?"

"I don't know."

"Do you recognize this writing?"

She handed him a crumpled letter, and he looked at it intently, a look of puzzled recollection dawning gradually over his face.

"It looks like—but it can't be. It's a disguised handwriting. Anyhow, it isn't me."

"You don't need to be so pious, Heathcote, and

your grammar is shocking. I suppose it's all the result of your new profession." She came a little closer, and put her hand on his shoulder. "Is this the 'splendid position'?" she asked with a gentle mockery.

"Cecilia, don't rub it in. I know—it was unpardonable, but it hurt like the devil. You won't understand—it was the humiliation—" He met her eyes with the courage of despair. "I wanted you to care, to—to respect me a little—and it seems—" he laughed miserably— "It seems I'm not respectable."

"Heathcote—"

A small complaining sigh interrupted her. She turned quickly.

"It's Archie," Heathcote said, remorse-stricken. "He's got an awful pain, poor little chap. I was just going to fetch some one when you came."

He followed her to the bedside, and they bent over together. Baby Archibald's eyes opened heavily, but lightened for a moment.

"Oh, mummy," he said. "I am so glad you've come. And father's here, too. It's so nice. You're not going away any more, are you?"

Mrs. St. John turned her head a little. Husband and wife looked at each other. Mr. St. John's hand glided along the edge of the box and touched another and smaller hand. He tried to look as though the contact was accidental, but his eyes betrayed him. Mrs. St. John's mouth trembled at the corners

—whether with tears or laughter, he could not be sure.

"No, I am not going away any more, whatever happens," she said. "I don't think we three can get on without one another, somehow."

Then without any further ado the big red hand grasped the small white one, and held it without apology.

"And I've got such a pain!" said Baby Archibald, returning to the matter of real importance. "Such a pain, mummy."

Instantly Mrs. St. John was all attention.

"Where, darling?" she asked tenderly.

"It's everywhere," Heathcote hastened to explain. "And he's feverish, and rather strange altogether, I—"

"You'd better go for a doctor, then. Be quick—I'll stay here and take care of him."

Heathcote snatched up his cap, and ran out of the room. He was stumbling on the landing, trying to find the wooden banisters when a hand caught him by the sleeve.

"You've forgotten your coat, Heathcote," his wife said. "How thoughtless you are! Please remember in the future that you are now a bread-winner, and that we can not afford to lose you."

There was a moment's silence. They could not see each other but it was as though something finer than a hand was feeling through the darkness, some all-powerful, all-divining instinct.

"Cecilia," he said brokenly, "it's such a rotten life. I've dragged you down with me. You won't be able to bear it."

"I shall bear it better than separation from you. And you haven't dragged me down. We've climbed whole mountains since that first awful night, and we are going to go on climbing—together. It's been an awful time; but it has taught us the real value of things—it has taught me to love you both better, Heathcote." She put her head against his shoulder, and he kissed her wildly. "I am so happy," she said with a tired sigh.

"My own wife!"

"My dear, dear husband!"

There was a very long silence indeed. And then—

"I think you had better go for the doctor," Mrs. St. John said gently.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE GOBLIN UNMASKS

IT was about half past nine at night when two mysteriously shrouded figures made their way stealthily over the cobbles of Harley Mews. That they were strangers was obvious, for they seemed very uncertain as to their destination, and the lady of the party picked her way with a disgust which suggested unfamiliarity with such a state of things.

"Really, this is the most extraordinary adventure I have ever indulged in," she said. "I think we had all better go and live in the slums, and have done with it. I thought you knew the road, Jeremy."

"So I do, only it's so confoundedly dark. Ah, here we are, number 11. Shall I knock?"

"Do what you like. You know the etiquette of these regions better than I do."

Mr. Samuels knocked, and presently the door was hesitatingly opened. The light of a candle revealed an embarrassed and grinning Tilda and a good-looking ostler, who was leaning against the wall with his hands in his pockets, trying unsuccessfully to appear at his ease.

"Evening, Tilda," said Mr. Samuels, with one foot in the doorway. "Is Mr. St. John at home?"

"Yes, sir, up-stairs. If you please, sir, as you're a friend, I—I'd like to hintroduce you. This is Mr. Jakes. 'E's—we are—"

She broke off in a nervous giggle, and Mr. Jakes came to the rescue.

"She means that we've gone and got fiancéed mister," he said. "And about time, too, ain't it, Tilly?"

Mr. Samuels brought his hand down on Mr. Jakes' shoulders with a hearty slap.

"Congratulate you, sir! You've got a jewel, I can tell you! Tilda, I shall have to stump up a handsome wedding present, shan't I? But I suppose that can wait a bit. Is Mrs. St. John here?"

"Yes, sir, up-stairs with Mr. 'Eathcote."

Mr. Samuels looked back over his shoulder.

"Either your watch or your theory is wrong," he said. "Cecilia is still here."

"Don't be impertinent, Jeremy," came back the answer out of the darkness.

"I'll try not to be. Tilda, can we go up-stairs?"

"I'll go up and see, sir. They're in a hawful state of mind. Master Harchibald is hill."

"What!" Mrs. Deschesney had pushed her companion out of the doorway. "Ill, did you say?"

"Yes, ma'am, very hill. They're waiting for the doctor. Master Harchibald 'as got hawful pains everywhere, and is a-wandering in 'is 'ead. 'E's a-hasking after goblins, and such like 'orrors."

"Let me go up-stairs at once—this is terrible!"

Mrs. Deschesney did not wait for the permission, but went up as fast as her dignity and the steepness of the stairs allowed. Mr. Samuels followed at her heels.

"It's the first door to the left," Tilda called up from the lower regions. "You can't miss it."

On the landing Mrs. Deschesney paused to take breath.

"Jeremy," he said, "you know it is not in my nature to apologize, but if I have been unjust in this matter—if, in fact, I have been mistaken and misjudged these people—and—others—I shall apologize."

"I shall expect you to do a lot more than that," said Mr. Samuels.

To avoid the necessity of answering, Mrs. Deschesney opened the door. She had forgotten to knock, and it was her fault entirely therefore that she found Mrs. St. John sitting on Mr. St. John's knee. It was a most bourgeois situation, but fortunately neither of the guilty ones seemed to mind very much.

"You see there is only one chair," Mrs. St. John explained, rising. "It's very good of you to come, Adelaide; but please be very quiet. Archibald is ill."

"Yes, so I have heard. I am thankful I came. Mr.—eh—Samuels brought me."

Cecilia looked at the square-shouldered figure standing in the shadow.

"Oh, yes, I remember," she said rather doubtfully. "Of Greene and Greene's, aren't you?"

Mr. Samuels executed an awkward bow.

"The same, ma'am, at your service."

"And my very good friend," Heathcote put in very heartily. "Mr. Samuels, your propensity for driving in hansoms and distributing extravagant tips will always be held in extravagant remembrance."

A small pathetic groan reduced the assembly to an abject silence. Mrs. Deschesney drew nearer.

"Cecilia," she said, "you and your husband can not possibly go on like this—it will kill that baby, and I am, as you know, absurdly fond of the child. I should be grateful—in fact—I should look upon it as a personal favor—if you all would make my house your home—unconditionally—now and for always, if you like."

"Bravo!" murmured Mr. Samuels from the background.

Mrs. St. John shook her head.

"It's awfully good of you, Adelaide, and perhaps we shall accept for a few days until we get things straight, but we are in no need of help. Something wonderful has happened. Heathcote, you tell."

Mr. St. John came forward. He held an open letter in his hand.

"I have just heard from Uncle Jeremy," he said. "It seems the old chap has been playing some sort

of a game at our expense, and he's not ruined at all —in fact, it was he who bought our house in Portman Square."

"Oh, now I understand!" Mrs. Deschesney ejaculated. "It's a great relief to me," she added severely to the shadow in the background. "Go on, Heathcote, this is most interesting. I always knew that Jeremy Harris was mad, but I am glad to find that he is not a thief."

"There appears to have been method in the old josser's madness, anyhow," said Heathcote, referring to the letter. "He seems to think that his money wasn't doing us any good, and 'pon my soul, I believe he was right. At any rate, now that he has proved what stuff we are made of, he has offered to give us back our old house and our old funds, or failing that—in case we have grown to love our independence—a partnership for me in the mining business in South Africa. I've decided for the latter, and, by jove, if I get the chance I shall work like a——"

"You'll get the chance right enough," said a grim voice. "Nephew, I congratulate you on your choice."

Heathcote started violently.

"Who the—who said that?" he demanded.

Mr. Samuels came into the light.

"I did, young man," he said. "I'm the old josser."

"You—Mr. Samuels—uncle—it isn't possible!"

"Oh, yes, it is. Now don't get excited. You might wake Archibald, and you owe that child more than you know. It was he who gave me the hint about you two, and the state of things between you, and I made up my mind for his sake to set 'em right. Shake hands, nephew, and give me a kiss, niece. You're not angry with the old man, are you?"

"I feel far too bewildered to feel angry with any one," said Mrs. St. John. Nevertheless she recovered from the shock quick enough to return his embrace with sincere warmth. "And I hope you'll forgive me if I ever said anything rude about you to your face. I couldn't have known, could I?"

"Of course not. And you can go on saying rude things if you want to—I dare say I deserve them. There is one thing more I should like to tell you," he went on casually. "Just before you came here I received a telegram from Mr. Harold Simpson. It seems that they are to be married as soon as possible. It seems that Mr. Simpson has gone back to the grocer business and is to open a little shop down in Putney." He coughed. "I thought some of you might be glad to know."

Heathcote and Cecilia heaved simultaneously suppressed sighs of relief. Mr. Samuels went over to where Mrs. Deschesney was standing and planted himself before her. "Adelaide!" he said.

"Yes, Mr. Harris?"

"Do you admit that you were very unjust to them—and to me?"

"Jeremy—is this a catechism?"

"Do you?"

"Y-es."

"Do you trust me now?"

"Yes, I suppose I must."

"And aren't you sorry you've wasted all these years?"

"Jeremy, I refuse to be bullied."

"Aren't you?"

"Perhaps, it was rather a pity."

"Are you or are you not sorry?"

"Jeremy, you are—yes, I am—a little."

He held out something which glittered and put it on her finger.

"It's taken me twenty years, but I've done it at last," he said with a sigh of satisfaction. "I think, Adelaide, you can give up your house in Portman Square. One will be enough for us now."

"Jeremy——" Her objections were satisfactorily squashed by the entrance of Tilda, whose scared face announced the arrival of the doctor. A short, fussy-looking little man stood on the threshold and gazed short-sightedly about him, apparently rather bewildered by the strange contrast in poverty and wealth which confronted him.

"I was sent for in a great hurry," he said. "Will you kindly tell me——?"

"Here is your patient," said Heathcote as though he felt there might be some doubt in the matter. "He has been in great pain, and we are very anxious about him."

As though to confirm his statements, a pathetic

groan came from Archibald's direction, and a hush fell on the assembly. The little doctor approached the bed. All the new-found happiness hung in suspense, as he made his examination. Heathcote, white to the lips, had put his arm round his wife's waist as though to support her in the hour of danger. Jeremy Harris had tiptoed with Mrs. Deschesney to the other side of the bed, and Tilda, who had retired to the passage, swallowed sobs in loud melancholy gulps.

When the doctor looked up there was a general stiffening. Each in his own way prepared himself to meet the worst.

The doctor's face was scarlet.

"Where is the mother of this child?" he demanded.

"Here," said Mrs. St. John. "I am."

"Then, madam, might I inquire how many pounds of strawberries you have allowed your son to consume daily?"

Mrs. St. John clung to her husband in stricken silence.

"And to think," said the doctor, "that I should have been disturbed to look after a child who has over-eaten himself!" He stalked angrily to the door. "Good night!"

"And the prescription?" said Heathcote, feeble with laughter.

"Endeavor not to overfeed him for the next

twenty-four hours!" the little medico snarled, and the door banged.

"After all, I have the best prescription," said Jeremy Harris. He bent over Baby Archibald, who had fallen into a light doze. "Grass Orphan!" he said.

The sleepy eyes opened for a moment.

"Halloo, Goblin!"

"I just wanted to tell you that you aren't a Grass Orphan any more. You run the risk of becoming the most spoilt brat that was ever born, and it will take all my magic to save you. But, anyhow, it's all right now." His voice sank to a whisper. "The fairy has given up her golden wand," he said. "She sees it's no good, against my charm. Your father and mother love you and each other. Have I done my job well? Are you satisfied?"

"Rather!"

"Pain better!"

"Yes, thank you."

"Good night, whilom Grass Orphan!"

"Good night, Goblin——"

The weary eyelids fell. Baby Archibald slept the sleep of the just and happy.

THE END